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## Tools for Communicating Effectively

There are a variety of options available for communicating with the public. The following lists some of the popular methods that are used. These are in addition to the descriptions found in other backgrounders for meetings, open houses, and advisory groups.

### Audio Visual Presentations

Audio Visual presentations involve the use of such media as slides, films, videos, and models. These are useful tools for consistent information, especially when a **large audience** is expected. Make sure the audience can see and hear. An audio-visual presentation is a one-way information delivery technique that is **best used to complement other public involvement approaches**. When using these media, offer a question and answer period afterwards to give the public an opportunity to provide feedback and engage in dialogue.

### Brochures, Information Bulletins and Fact Sheets

Brochures, information bulletins and fact sheets are one-way information delivery tools for informing the public. Brochures and information bulletins usually offer **brief descriptions of the project**, the issues involved, the proposed measures for dealing with impacts and projects opportunities, and a summary of opportunities through which the public can participate in the public involvement process. Fact sheets generally summarize factual information about specific components of the activity or project. Brochures, bulletins, and fact sheets can be used at any time to describe the plans, status and issues related to your activities. It is often useful to have these information materials reviewed by an advisory committee.

Another tool, cumulative brochures, can be used to keep a visible record of a series of meetings (e.g., workshops or advisory meetings). At the beginning of the process, initial issues and alternatives are presented. Then, in a series of public involvement sessions, new issues and alternatives are added. The brochure is then published and reactions are obtained. These comments become part of a new brochure. With each round of public involvement, the brochure grows and changes. The final document provides a visible record of the entire process.

### Community Technical Assistance

The public can feel intimidated when companies present their points of view through technical studies. Companies can reduce these feelings by providing the opportunity for independent technical consultants to help community groups analyze issues, develop their own alternatives and evaluate the impacts of various project alternatives. In highly

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controversial situations, studies and reports generated by independent technical consultants may be more readily accepted than those generated by a company's staff or consultants. Selection of independent consultants by the community helps to ensure their acceptance.

## **Computer-Based Techniques**

Computers can be used to deliver information (e.g., through e-mail, web pages and software) and demonstrate the impacts of different decisions on an outcome (e.g., through simulations). **Game simulation** is a computer based technique designed to allow people to simulate the effects of making different policy choices or implementing different project alternatives. In the process of simulation, participants learn more about the interrelated nature of the impacts of decisions on the environment, social and economic systems. Simulations provides an opportunity for publics to test their options and see the consequences and the reactions of other groups. The closer the game resembles reality the more lengthy and complex it usually becomes. This method is useful as **a tool to inform people of the consequences of different choices**, but typically it does not provide opportunities for public input into project development. **It should therefore be used in conjunction with other involvement techniques.**

Electronic mail and web pages on the Internet are being uses by increasing numbers of people. Through these tools, a company or facility can communicate with local residents and other interested and affected publics. However, recognize that Internet communications do not reach everyone.

## **Displays at Local Events**

Create awareness of a project or operation and of your public involvement activities by having displays at local events such as trade fairs, farmers' markets, rodeos, agricultural fairs, school career days and open houses. These events can also provide opportunities to solicit questions, comments, suggestions or concerns about activities.

## **Hiring Local People**

Hiring local people involves the direct employment of local citizens by n organization. This can bring the community's values and interests directly into your development decisions, and provide some local economic benefit from your activities. The local persons hired may reflect some of the dominate values and interests of the community. They may be able to identify, for your planners, the relevant players and organizations in the area, the past history of the community involvement with industry, and the potential community response to other forms of public involvement. However, it is important to recognize that local employees cannot actually represent the community, as they have neither been given a mandate nor been elected by the community to do so.

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You could, for example, hire a community coordinator/facilitator, an individual assigned responsibility for involving publics in the planning process. He/she would invite interested individuals and groups to participate in the involvement process, conduct meetings and coordinate workshops in which interested parties can interact. The coordinator would act as a link between the organizations' officials and the public. Members of the public would look to the coordinator to acquaint themselves with relevant information and opportunities to be involved in the planning processes. The effectiveness of this technique relies heavily on the capability and integrity of the coordinator and her relationships and reputation in the community.

Other opportunities for hiring locals and purchasing from local suppliers should also be identified and pursued. Local benefits can help balance local concerns or negative impacts. However, it is difficult for communities to believe there will be local benefits accruing from a project if no attempt is made to maximize benefits during the planning stages.

### **Hotlines (1-800-Number)**

A hotline is a direct telephone line that is used **to receive input or receive requests from the public**. The number, which is often toll-free and paid for by the organization, can be published in brochures, bulletins, fact sheets and advertisements, and on your web page. Citizens can all ask questions, lodge complaints or make comments about various issues. Hotlines are staffed by individuals who take responsibility for finding answers to questions and for relaying comments or complaints to appropriate company personnel. Comments received over a hotline can be incorporated as a part of record of public meetings or hearings. **The communication skills of hotline operators are important.**

### **Interviewers and Questionnaires**

Interviews and questionnaires are commonly **used to gather factual information** about people or places, **or to record indicators of knowledge**, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, motivations, anticipations, future plans, or recollections of past behavior. Often a small sampling of a larger study group is used to **obtain a representative range of views**.

In a questionnaire, the information obtained is limited to written responses to pre-arranged questions. In an interview, there is an opportunity for greater care in communicating questions and in eliciting information because the interviewer and interviewee are both present. Questionnaires are always structured whereas interviews may be structured or unstructured.

There are specializing skills involved in effective questionnaire development, interviewing and analysis of resulting data. As a result, **someone with training and experience should be involved** to ensure useful results.

## **Newsletters**

Newsletters are similar to information bulletins. They are periodic reports to the public used to maintain a continuing interest in a project operation. As well, newsletters can document the progress of the project or operation in a highly visible manner. Newsletters are particularly important during technical phases of a project. It is at these times the public is less likely to be involved but should be kept informed. Ideally, newsletters should be jointly planned and developed by industry, community and government groups working in an area or around an issue.

## **News Letters and Press Releases**

News letters are commonly used for informing the press of newsworthy stories. Usually no longer than two pages in length, a news release can be written as an announcement, a story or a fact sheet highlighting a particular issue, event, plan, or result. It can handle official statements from your company backed by facts, figures and contacts for further information. Releases should be sent out well in advance of the day you want them to run. You may also consider holding a press conference to review the information in the release and give reporters a chance to ask questions.

News releases and press conferences must offer the media something that will interest readers or viewers. Too many media releases or those that are not newsworthy can undermine a company's credibility.

## **Site Visits**

Site visits and tours provide information and first-hand experience for community members by bringing them into your facility or operations area. Well organized site visits also serve to help visitors feel more at home with your operation and more willing to discuss and take part in involvement processes.

## **Small Group Discussions**

Small group discussions are often used in large group meetings to ensure topics can be effectively addressed. Breaking a large group into smaller discussion groups can facilitate discussion and resolution by dividing topics among and reducing the number of people involved in each topic.

This is a technique often used where a large group is faced with many topics and too little time to adequately address them. Rather than tabling topics to later meetings, several small groups are formed to use the meeting time more efficiently. Each small group

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focuses on the tone topic and then reports back to the larger group at the end of the meeting.

Before the small groups break off to discuss their chosen topics, it's typical for the facilitator to make a short presentation describing the technical background of the project and the issues to be addressed in the small groups. It's also helpful to give the small groups a common approach to follow in discussing their topics so they can contribute their results in a similar format at the end. The small group discussions can take one or more hours, depending on how much time is available. The subsequent reports from each discussion group of their opinions and findings may take another hour and should include time for questions and clarifications from the rest of the group. Small groups are best kept to under dozen participants (preferably no more than eight) to encourage participation of everyone and to discourage separate discussions on the side.

### **Storefront Offices**

Storefront Offices are occasionally established in communities where a project or activity has the potential for significant impact. Typically, an office is placed in a highly visible part of the community. It is staffed by people able to answer questions and solicit opinions from the local community. It is designed to encourage informal interaction with the community through exhibits, charts, maps, models, brochures and other materials on display. Other activities such as workshops or seminars may be held in the office to reinforce this location as a focal point for public involvement in the planning process.

### **Technical Information**

Technical or scientific information can be used to help the public better understand your project. However, it must be relevant, used in the context of the issue at hand, and understandable to the public. Technical information can supplement other public involvement efforts and contribute to educating participants about the technical elements that must be considered in project planning and decision making. Don't assume your public will have the technical background necessary to understand your information without explanation. Find out what they know and present your technical information in that context.

### **Training Programs**

Training programs are usually held to improve public understanding of how projects are conducted. They are generally designed to inform participants about technical information necessary to understand the project, or to improve communication between the public and company personnel. Training programs can focus on planning and decision-making processes, environmental or socioeconomic impact assessments, and workshop leadership. The objective of such programs is to ensure the public has

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sufficient background to participate effectively in the public involvement process and work with professionals without intimidation.

## **Workshops and Seminars**

Workshops and seminars are usually held for smaller audiences and differ from focused group discussions in that they generally have a specific task or goal to be accomplished. Typically, these tasks include defining alternative actions for a project, evaluating a set of alternatives or identifying the impacts of the alternatives.

## **Other Public Information Activities**

### **Public Announcements and Mass Communications**

News releases or press conferences, media advertising, newsletters, fact sheets, posters, utility bill inserts, public service announcements, website to describe a new program or a participation opportunity.

### **Polls, Surveys and Questionnaires**

Canned sample opinions or reactions of a very large group through statistically valid representative samples.

Expensive if done well enough to be meaningful

Helpful for simple questions and issues but difficult to use on more complicated issues or design challenges.

Useful to gather background information and issues but difficult to use on more complicated issues or design challenges.

Useful to gather background information going into a policy design stage, or to check on public reaction to a proposal.

### **Discussion Papers and Written Submissions**

Involves releasing a draft discussion paper, advertising its availability and sending it to known interested parties.

Provides an opportunity for review and response and for questions to be clarified.

Very time consuming for participants

Restricts participation to fairly literate participants (or formal interest organizations) with time and resources to review and prepare a written response.

### **Open Houses**

Informal events to allow people to drop in at their convenience.

Get much lower participation than information sessions but produce better dialogue and understanding for those who do attend.

### **Targeted Briefings**

Consist of an oral or audio-visual presentation to be a select audience.

May be accompanied by release of a written document.

Question and answer is limited usually to clarification and ensuring understanding of a decision or proposal.

Allows for a more detailed explanation and exploration of concerns or implications unique to a particular group.

### **Focus Group Sessions**

A small closed gathering of invited participants specifically selected for the topic or issue.

Use professional facilitation to present a focused issue, question or proposal for feedback and reaction.

Allows for in-depth public opinion research and analysis or reactions, values and perspectives toward a proposal or question.

Not a substitute for more open and inclusive activities.

### **Kitchen Round Tables/Coffee Meetings**

Informal small group get-togethers held where people are gathering anyway.

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Informality and familiar setting can increase the confidence and comfort level of participants and promote more frank helpful discussion.

Requires considerable cooperation at the community level.

## Public Consultative Activities

### **Public Hearings**

In formal proceedings an appointed board or panel hears views and evidence, weighs the information submitted and makes a decision or a recommendation.

Places trust and faith in the board or panel to make the best decision.

Tend to be more adversarial due to their quasi-judicial nature.

No opportunity for participants to discuss and resolve conflicts.

More suitable for testing or selecting between fairly technical options.

Final option to deal with issues that could not be resolved through consultation.

### **Public Seminars**

There is no “audience” and those attending are expected to be active participants.

Open to a wide public initially but may require pre-registration or some selection process.

Combine presentations, large group discussion, and break-out sessions.

More in-depth discussion on fairly broad-based topics or programs, sometimes develop a common direction.

### **Workshops**

Participation may be open or may be by invitation only.

Restricted to more specific topics, with a more demanding problem-solving task.

Are dominated by discussion and interaction among the participants.

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Used to define issues, develop terms of reference, plan a participation program, give guidance to design work, review a technical study or a draft plan.

Should not involve 15 or 20 people (ideally under ten).

Can break up a larger group and reconvene.

Facilitation is crucial.

### **Pre-Consultation Meetings**

First step in a broader consultation program.

Focus on the design of terms of reference, timeline, proposed activities, decision-making process, resource support to voluntary sector, background information needs.

Alternatively, may be accomplished by a series of one-on-one interviews or in a multi-stakeholder meeting.

### **Public Advisory Committees or Working Groups**

Small groups of people who represent various special interests, points of view and fields of expertise, may include Suncor, NGOs, landowners, aboriginal representatives, government agencies, regulatory agencies, federal government, local government representatives, consultants, facilitators, and others depending on the nature of the proposal.

Meet on a regular basis to guide a consultation process and help develop the resulting policy service or program.

Representatives should be selected by their constituency.

Can also guide direction of a public involvement program, and the development of materials or background studies.

Can identify and clarify issues, develop and evaluate alternative courses of action or policy and address conflicting points of view.

Participants develop a more detailed understanding of issues, options and perspectives of other participants.

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Higher chance of generating solutions which accommodate competing interests.

Can generate a higher sense of buy-in from stakeholders.

Require substantial commitments of time and resources from participants and from Suncor in terms of staff support and possible financial support for members. (e.g., travel costs).

### **Monitoring Committees**

Similar to an advisory committee.

Have a mandate to oversee and advise on the successful implementation of a policy or program, or to evaluate success or compliance over a longer term.

May be a condition of gaining public acceptance.

### **Public Appointments to Longer Term Planning or Policy-Making Bodies**

Poor substitutes to consultation if done in isolation.

Can effectively increase public involvement in implementation once major policy decisions have been made.

## Collaboration or Joint Planning

### **Sponsor-Initiated Stakeholder Collaboratives**

A group of participants selected by a sponsoring agency to represent a wide range of interests and perspectives.

Are asked to resolve an issue or develop a program for the sponsor.

Usually include the sponsor as a participant with an equal voice and the same power in decision-making as others.

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In a substantial transfer of power from the sponsor to the participants in return for a high quality policy or program design with support of all (or most of) the affected stakeholders.

Commitment from the sponsor to implement whatever the group comes up with.

### **Mediation and Negotiation**

Two or more parties enter into an equal power relationship to resolve a conflict by putting their views forward, listening to each other and attempting to move towards an agreement which each can live with.

Requires the assistance of a neutral third party.

Useful where unresolved in blocking acceptance of consensus or a solution.

Note: This information is taken from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers *Guide for Effective Public Involvement* and Suncor Energy Inc. *Stakeholder Relations Handbook*