

SAVING THE SIERRA

Grassroots Solutions for Sustaining Rural Communities
A One-Hour Radio Documentary by jesikah maria ross & Catherine Stifter



SUSTAINING RURAL PLACES TOOL KIT

Brought to you by the Sierra Business Council in partnership with Saving the Sierra

Public Participation Tools

Nothing is more important in a democratic society than encouraging public participation and ensuring that the public is a primary part of the decision-making processes. This is increasingly difficult to achieve when we continue to suffer from a sense of disconnect with community, as well as physical and institutional infrastructures that diminish social connection.

Public participation in the decision-making process is absolutely necessary to ensure transparency, build trust, create accountability, strengthen the commitment of stakeholders, build support for implementation, and ensure that the benefit of outcomes are equitably distributed.

There are a number of tools that can be used to increase participation in general decision-making processes, including:

- One-on-one discussions—targeted outreach to elements of society that are often under represented,
- Study circles—organized discussions in advance of an effort to increase awareness, understanding of issues, and identify potential areas for increased attention,
- Free media strategies—advance planning to create awareness about issues to heighten the anticipation for public processes,
- Briefings or expert panels—advance briefings for the public to prepare for participation,
- Surveys—polling or phone banking to gather information in advance of a process,
- Focus groups—designed to test messages or ideas with randomly selected members of the public to obtain input on decisions and processes.

These following resources will help provide further guidance:

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www.savingthesierra.org



www.sbcouncil.org



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The International Association of Public Participation

www.iap2.org

The National Park Service—Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

www.nps.gov/phso/rctatoolbox/index_comtoolbox.htm

Public participation in emotionally charged community land use planning decisions can often be difficult to manage. Everyone has probably had the experience of seeing people at a podium get the “three minutes and out” treatment. You have three minutes to state your case, with no questions and no dialogue, and then you are done—your experience with democracy leaving you feeling a bit hollow. Yet public participation in these decisions is particularly important in the west, where rapid growth is creating significant community conflict over planning issues.

There are a number of techniques that can help with community land use planning decisions, including:

- Early adoption of community visioning processes, in advance of proposals for change and development,
- Participatory mapping exercises where community members map the future and design their own community land use alternatives,
- Incorporation of mapping or geographic information systems to help the public visualize the change being discussed,
- Computer modeling to project changes in visual impacts, traffic, housing availability and economics,
- Visual preference surveys to help people define what they want in their communities and where they want it,
- Focus grouping and public opinion polling to help direct decisions,
- Environmental justice analysis to identify what groups in a community are most likely to realize impacts of decisions,
- Interactive and collaborative working groups designed to broadly represent the needs and interests within the community,
- Community design “charettes” or planning sessions where the community actually participates in the design of a neighborhood, project or landscape,
- “Open Space” meetings where participants work collectively to release creativity and innovation to overcome community problems.

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The following resources will provide some guidance about which techniques or activities may be appropriate in your community:

The Sierra Business Council (Multiple Tools)

www.sbcouncil.org/Sense-of-Place

The Local Government Commission (Participation)

www.lgc.org

The California League of Cities (Participation)

www.cacities.org/resource_files/22556.PCH_sec3.pdf

The National Charette Institute (Design Charettes)

www.charretteinstitute.org/

The National Civic League (Community Visioning)

www.ncl.org/publications/online/VSPHandbook.pdf

A.Nelessen and Associates (Visual Preference Surveys)

anelessen.com/

The University of California at Berkeley (Environmental Justice)

www.its.berkeley.edu/research/ejhandbook/ejhandbook.html

Open Space World (New Meeting Techniques)

www.openspaceworld.org