



INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Promoting Good Government at the Local Level

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

Assessing Public Engagement Effectiveness: Rapid Review Worksheets

Introduction: The Need for Assessing Public Engagement

Local officials are increasingly using a wide range of public engagement strategies to help them inform, consult with and deliberatively engage residents on topics such as land use, budgeting, housing, sustainability, health and environment, public safety and much more.

Typically, cities and counties devote a great deal of time and effort to the planning and delivery of public engagement processes. However, given the press of daily responsibilities, local officials often spend relatively little time assessing how these processes worked for the local agency and the community.

The assessment of local agency-sponsored public engagement is important as it enables local officials and others to gauge participant satisfaction, identify lessons learned, and make refinements and improvements in future efforts. These assessments can be helpful for public engagement efforts that are developed and delivered directly by a local agency as well as when they are managed and facilitated by consultants.

How these Rapid Review Worksheets Can Help

While there is a growing body of literature and experience about how to engage the public, there are few practical tools to gauge the success of these approaches.

Recognizing that local officials and staff have limited time and resources, the Institute for Local Government has created these online *Rapid Review Worksheets* to help local governments assess how well their public engagement processes worked.

Additional Resources for Planning Public Engagement Activities

The Institute's website (www.ca-ilg.org/engagement) offers local officials a variety of resources to guide public engagement design and planning efforts.

Through the use of these *Rapid Review Worksheets*, a local agency that has sponsored, organized and/or convened a public engagement process or activity can collect information from both participants and relevant local officials. The goal is to gauge the relative success of the process just completed and to guide improvements to future engagement activities.

A Guide to Upfront Process Planning

These *Rapid Review Worksheets* can also be useful at the public engagement planning stage. An early review of the questions contained in the worksheets can help guide the planning and design of the engagement process as well as ensure that the design and purposes of the engagement process match up with what the agency plans to evaluate.

How to Use the *Rapid Review Worksheets*

Within the full set of *Rapid Review Worksheets*, there are four general components (A, B, C, and D) that are available to help local agencies and others assess the success of their public engagement efforts. One or more of these evaluative components may be used depending on the interests and goals of the users.

There is a review worksheet for public engagement participants: **Participant Review Instructions and Worksheet** (Worksheet A).

There is another worksheet for the relevant sponsoring and responsible local officials: **Local Official Sponsors/Conveners Review Instructions and Worksheet** (Worksheet B).

Participants and the relevant local officials complete their worksheets to express their respective perceptions of the public engagement process just completed. There are four possible responses to each of the twenty statements in these worksheets: *strongly disagree*; *somewhat disagree*; *somewhat agree*, and *strongly agree*.

Local government agencies can use *only* the participant worksheet in order to gauge the satisfaction and feedback of participants; or they may use *both* the participant worksheet (“A”) and the local official worksheet (“B”) to compare the responses of local officials who have sponsored/organized the public engagement activity to the responses of participants. Both of these worksheets offer the same basic statements and, used together, allow for a useful comparison of perceptions of sponsors and participants. Such a comparison can be instructive in terms of assessing a current public engagement activity and making changing improvements in future public engagement efforts.

Both the participant and the local official worksheet also allow opportunities for those completing the forms to quickly add and total the responses for the four subsections of each worksheet questionnaire. Each subsection focuses on a different aspect of the completed public engagement process: *preparation*; *participants*; *process*; and *results*. If participants are asked to total their responses to each section, they can get a quick picture of how each section ranked in comparison to the others. This can also be a useful starting point for a facilitated discussion

among participants about the public engagement process, if process sponsors wish to (and have time to) make this available.

There are six optional questions on Worksheet A and Worksheet B that follow the twenty basic worksheet statements. They primarily ask the respondent to reflect on his/her responses to the individual questions and to the subsection categories. These may be included or not depending on the interests of process sponsors.

The Participant Review Worksheet can be completed at the end of a public engagement meeting, or can be emailed or mailed later to participants with a request that they be returned. Obviously having participants fill it out before they leave a meeting will help ensure a better response, but this may not always be possible.

Local officials (or others involved in organizing, sponsoring and/or convening the public meetings) will typically fill out the Local Officials Review Worksheet no more than a few days after the public engagement process is complete. While this may be completed individually, it is preferable that the appropriate local officials meet together to collectively determine responses. If the local official worksheet is to be used, it is also preferable that the appropriate local officials complete their worksheets *before* they see the participant responses.

The third worksheet, the **Comparison Worksheet** (Worksheet C), is an Excel document that compares, side by side, the aggregated responses of participants and local officials to the same public participation assessment questions. Worksheet C contains a **Participants Tally Sheet**, a **Local Officials Tally Sheet**, and a **Comparison Sheet**. The tally sheets allow easy online computation of the responses from the Participant Worksheet (Worksheet A) and the Local Official Worksheet (Worksheet B). The aggregated responses from both tally sheets are automatically entered on to the Comparison Sheet.

The Comparison Worksheet provides insights into areas where participants and sponsors agree and disagree in their opinions about the completed public engagement process. This can help identify areas for reflection and improvement, and generate useful discussions among local officials about future public engagement processes. Discussion questions for process organizers/sponsors follow the Comparison Worksheet.

The fourth component of the *Rapid Review Worksheets* is the **Process Improvement Worksheet** (Worksheet D) that is intended to help local officials (and others if desired) to: a) discuss the responses from both participants and sponsors; b) address specific evaluative questions intended for local officials alone; and c) identify and document improvements. There is a chart that lists all twenty statements and provides space to note possible improvement ideas. This is followed by four “Additional Assessment Questions” that are particularly important for local officials to ask and answer. Finally, there is room to document “Priority Recommendations to Improve Public Engagement” so that ideas for improvements can be explained and memorialized for future reference and use.

Please note that all worksheets are products of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) and may not be altered.

Overall, this set of *Rapid Review Worksheets* lays out a four-step public engagement review process. Some local agencies may wish to use one or a number of these assessment steps; others may wish to follow all four. The following chart reviews each worksheet's purpose.

Worksheets Description Summary	
A.	Participant Review Worksheet A. A worksheet for public engagement participants to assess their experiences. This worksheet contains 20 statements, with four possible responses for each statement, that allow participants to indicate their perspectives on the public engagement process. As an option, the worksheet also includes a short list of questions that participants can reflect or comment on individually, or be used to guide discussions among participants.
B.	Local Official Sponsor/Convener Review Worksheet B. A worksheet for the local agency sponsors/conveners to provide their perspectives on how they believe participants experienced the public engagement process. (The 20 statements and response choices match those on the Participant Worksheet.) There is also a short list of questions that can be considered individually and/or be used to launch a discussion with the other local officials completing the worksheet.
C.	Comparison Worksheet C. An Excel document that provides side by side comparisons of the aggregated participant and local officials responses to the statements on Review Worksheets A and B, demonstrating similarities and differences between the views of participants and local agency officials. Two accompanying tally sheets allow easy online computation of these responses. There are also questions to guide initial discussion on these points by local officials.
D.	Process Improvement Worksheet D. A worksheet to guide local officials' discussions of information from Worksheet C, identify areas of improvement, and document these improvements for future public engagement processes. Discussions and recommendations can build on the compared responses of participant and local officials on the Comparison Worksheet (C) and from the specific additional questions for local official sponsor/conveners found on this worksheet.

Each component builds on the previous one, creating additional insights, documenting what has been learned, and clarifying how improvements can be made in future public engagement activities. However, local officials may choose to use only the Participant Worksheet A, or the Participant Worksheet A and the questions in step two and three of the Process Improvement Worksheet D.

You can find all of these forms on line at www.ca-ilg.org/rapidreview. For more information contact the Institute for Local Government, Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance program, at 916.658.8208 or e-mail Carmen Pereira at cpereira@ca-ilg.org.

Participant Review Worksheet A: Instructions for Use

At the completion of a public engagement process, an immediate assessment of the participants' experience is important. The following questionnaire offers a set of 20 statements that participants respond to by checking: *strongly disagree*; *somewhat disagree*; *somewhat agree*; or *strongly agree*. These responses provide a snapshot of participant opinions about the public engagement process. These responses can also provide a starting point for discussions with participants and among process sponsors/conveners.

Participants generally take no more than five or six minutes to complete the questionnaire. It may be best to copy the two-page questionnaire on the front and back of a single page to keep pages from getting separated.

It is helpful if each participant can be asked to add up and give the totals for the responses in each category of their individual questionnaire. (**Note that these are totals of the number values, not how many times the participants selected a “1” or “2” as a response.**) This addition allows participants to have a sense of what aspects of the process worked better, or less well, for them. This will add a few minutes to the time needed for evaluation. However if you wish to give participants the time to talk about their responses with each other and discuss the optional questions, these totals will be helpful.

The questions for reflection and discussion may be used to ask each participant to individually reflect on their answers to the worksheet questions or as preparation for joint discussions among participants. Of course, discussions are possible only if participants are in the room together rather than filling out the worksheets later and returning them by mail or email. The forms can also be submitted to public engagement organizers to add to the evaluative information collected.

This Worksheet can be used after a one meeting or multi-step public engagement process. If there is more than one kind of process or approach used to engage the public, it will probably be best to review each independently.

Worksheet C, an online Excel document, contains a Participants Tally Sheet (see explanation under “Comparison Worksheet C”) that can be used to easily aggregate the participant responses to all 20 statements and automatically add these “scores” to the Comparison Sheet.

Participant Review Worksheet A:

Meeting _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Step One: Please rank the following statements from 1 to 4 depending on if you (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) somewhat agree or (4) strongly agree. Circle 1, 2, 3 or 4 for each item, add up the totals for each category. [Example: 2 responses for “Somewhat Agree” = 6, 3 responses for “Strongly Disagree” = 3; Total for category = 9. Do the same for each category.]

RATE YOUR EXPERIENCE				
	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
CATEGORY 1: PREPARATION				
1. The notice, advertisement or invitation to participate was clear and welcoming.	1	2	3	4
2. Information about the meeting topic, provided to me before or at the meeting, helped prepare me to participate more effectively.	1	2	3	4
3. The purpose of the meeting was clear to me	1	2	3	4
4. Before the meeting, I believed that any <i>individual</i> views offered would be taken seriously by policymakers.	1	2	3	4
5. Before the meeting, I believed that any <i>collective</i> views or recommendations developed would be seriously considered by policymakers.	1	2	3	4
SUBTOTAL	+	+	+	=
CATEGORY 2: PARTICIPANTS				
6. The participants in the meeting reflected the diversity of the people and views of our community.	1	2	3	4
7. The mix of participants was appropriate for the topic of the meeting.	1	2	3	4
8. I felt comfortable with the other participants.	1	2	3	4
9. Meeting participants treated each other respectfully.	1	2	3	4
10. Other participants were constructive in their comments.	1	2	3	4
SUBTOTAL	+	+	+	=

RATE YOUR EXPERIENCE	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
CATEGORY 3: PROCESS				
11. The agenda and process for the meeting were appropriate for the topic and helped make the meeting productive.	1	2	3	4
12. There was sufficient opportunity for me to express my views about what I thought was important.	1	2	3	4
13. There was sufficient opportunity for participants to exchange views and learn from each other.	1	2	3	4
14. There was sufficient opportunity for participants to develop joint views or recommendations.	1	2	3	4
15. The facilitator(s) provided a safe, fair and well-managed environment for participants.	1	2	3	4
SUBTOTAL		+	+	+
				=
CATEGORY 4: RESULTS				
16. I changed my thinking about the topic as a result of this public engagement process.	1	2	3	4
17. I believe that this meeting will result in better decisions on the topic discussed.	1	2	3	4
18. I understand how decision makers will use the results of this meeting.	1	2	3	4
19. If asked, I would participate again in meetings like this.	1	2	3	4
20. I would encourage other residents to participate in similar public engagement processes on this or other appropriate topics.	1	2	3	4
SUBTOTAL		+	+	+
				=
TOTAL				

Any comments you'd like to add? _____

Step Two (Optional): Questions for Reflection and/or Discussion:

1. Which individual statement(s) did you most strongly agree with? Why?

2. Which individual statement(s) do you most strongly disagree with? Why?

3. Which category of statements did you score highest? Why?

4. Which category of statements did you score lowest? Why?

5. For you, were there any surprising or unanticipated results from this public engagement process?

6. For you, what would have most improved this public engagement process?

Local Officials (Sponsors/Conveners) Review Worksheet B: Instructions for Use

At the completion of a public engagement process, it is also important for local agency sponsors/conveners to assess the process. This may include elected or appointed officials as well as staff, who were directly involved in process planning and delivery. Ideally, these would be individuals who had a chance to actually see the process, although this may not always be possible.

It is best if the local officials do not review the participant worksheets before they complete their own.

This response template offers a set of 20 statements - **matched to those of participants** - that can provide a starting point for discussions among local officials who have organized, convened and/or facilitated the process. The form can be used after a one meeting or multi-step public engagement process. However, if more than one kind of process or approach is used to engage the public, it will probably be best to review each independently.

It is preferable that those local officials who will fill out the questionnaire meet together to collectively discuss and complete a single questionnaire. This provides an opportunity for joint discussions and shared perspectives, and also prevents the need for tabulation of the multiple local officials' responses.

If local official sponsors/conveners do fill out this worksheet individually, there is a tabulation sheet, Local Officials Tally Sheet (see explanation under "Comparison Worksheet C") that will automatically aggregate the responses to each statement and automatically place the median score on the Comparison Sheet.

In either case, it is helpful to tabulate the responses to each **categorical section** of the questionnaire. This allows local officials to have a sense of what aspects of the process they believed worked better, or less well, for participants. If done individually this will add a few minutes to the time needed to complete the evaluation.

The questions for reflection and discussion at the end of the questionnaire may be used by local officials to individually or collectively reflect on their responses and begin to assess the public engagement process. Of course, discussions are possible only if participants are in the room together rather than filling out the worksheets individually.

Local Official Sponsors/Conveners Review Worksheet B:

Step One: Please rank the following statements from 1 to 4 based on *how you think participants experienced the public engagement process*: (1) strongly disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) somewhat agree, or (4) strongly agree. Circle the 1, 2, 3 or 4 for each item, and, if requested, add up the totals for each category. [Example: 2 responses for “Somewhat Disagree” = 4, 3 responses for “Strongly Agree” = 12; Total for category = 16. Do the same for each category.]

ASSESS YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF HOW PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCED THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
CATEGORY 1: PREPARATION				
1. The notice, advertisement and/or invitation to participate was clear and welcoming.	1	2	3	4
2. Information about the meeting topic, provided to attendees before or at the meeting, helped prepare them to participate more effectively.	1	2	3	4
3. The purpose of the meeting was clear to participants.	1	2	3	4
4. Before the meeting, participants believed their <i>individual</i> views would be seriously considered by policymakers.	1	2	3	4
5. Before the meeting, participants believed their <i>collective</i> views or recommendations would be seriously considered by policymakers.	1	2	3	4
SUBTOTAL		+	+	+
CATEGORY 2: PARTICIPANTS				
6. The participants in the meeting reflected the diversity of the people and views of our community.	1	2	3	4
7. The mix of participants was appropriate for the topic of the meeting.	1	2	3	4
8. Participants felt comfortable with each other.	1	2	3	4
9. Participants treated each other respectfully.	1	2	3	4
10. Those attending believed that other participants were constructive in their comments.	1	2	3	4
SUBTOTAL		+	+	+

ASSESS YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF HOW PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCED THE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
CATEGORY 3: PROCESS				
11. The agenda and process for the meeting were appropriate for the topic and helped make the meeting productive.	1	2	3	4
12. There was sufficient opportunity for participants to express their views about what they thought was important.	1	2	3	4
13. There was sufficient opportunity for participants to exchange views and learn from each other.	1	2	3	4
14. There was sufficient opportunity for participants to develop joint views and/or recommendations.	1	2	3	4
15. The facilitator(s) provided a safe, fair and well-managed environment for participants.	1	2	3	4
SUBTOTAL	+	+	+	=
CATEGORY 4: RESULTS				
16. Participants changed their thinking about the topic as a result of this public engagement process.	1	2	3	4
17. Participants believed that this meeting will result in better decisions on the topic discussed.	1	2	3	4
18. It was clear to participants how decision makers will use the results of this meeting.	1	2	3	4
19. If asked, those attending would participate in meetings like this again.	1	2	3	4
20. Participants would encourage other residents to participate in similar public engagement processes on this or other appropriate topics.	1	2	3	4
SUBTOTAL	+	+	+	=
TOTAL				

Comparison Worksheet C and Instructions for Use

The third worksheet, the **Comparison Worksheet** (Worksheet C), is an Excel document that compares, side by side, the aggregated responses of participants and local officials to the same public participation assessment statements, and guides initial discussion on these points. This is often a discussion by local officials alone, but may be a joint discussion with participants or participant representatives. In some cases, this worksheet may be used by commissions or other local bodies who are charged with improving public engagement.

The **Comparison Worksheet** (*Worksheet C*) contains a **Participants Tally Sheet**, a **Local Officials Tally Sheet**, and a **Comparison Sheet**. The tally sheets allow easy online computation of the responses from the Participant Worksheet (*Worksheet A*) and the Local Official Worksheet (*Worksheet B*), and the aggregated responses are automatically entered on to the Comparison Sheet.

Review the compared responses to each statement on the Comparison Sheet. What individual statements and subsection categories were rated highest and lowest by participants? Where are the greatest similarities and differences in responses – for individual questions or for the subsection categories – between participants and local officials? What insights into the public engagement process do participant scores and these comparisons offer? Find discussion questions for process organizers/sponsors following the Comparison Worksheet.

To access the tally and comparison Excel sheets, visit www.ca-ilg.org/rapidreview.

Participant Tally Sheet

Local Officials Tally Sheet

Comparison Sheet

Please note that the next worksheet (Process Improvement Worksheet D) offers the opportunity for further reflection on the information contained in Comparison Worksheet C, and provides additional evaluative questions for consideration by local official sponsors. Worksheet D also provides a place to identify and document ideas for improving public engagement processes in the future.

Discussion Questions

1. What individual statements and subsection categories were rated highest and lowest by participants? What does this suggest?
2. What individual statements and subsection categories were rated highest and lowest by local official sponsors/convenors? What does this suggest?
3. Which individual items reflect the greatest similarity – and greatest difference - in scores between participants and local officials? What does this suggest?
4. Which categories reflect the greatest similarity - and greatest difference - in scores between participants and local officials? What does this suggest?

Process Improvement Worksheet D and Instructions for Use

This worksheet (Worksheet D) has three parts:

- **Step One:** The first part of this worksheet provides an opportunity to brainstorm and discuss ideas for public engagement improvement based on a review of the Comparison Worksheet C.
- **Step Two:** The second part of this worksheet provides additional specific questions about the public engagement process that should be considered by the local agency sponsors/conveners.
- **Step Three:** The third part of this worksheet provides an opportunity to make and document recommendations intended to improve the local agency's next public engagement effort.

The work described in Worksheet D is best completed collectively, in meeting, by those local officials involved in the completed public engagement process.

Step One. First, identify for discussion the statements or general categories from the Comparison Worksheet C that you think require attention. These may be instances where the rankings of participants and officials are substantially different, or where comments by one or both groups suggest room for improvement. Discuss these together, one statement at a time, also reviewing any written comments provided on the participant worksheets (Worksheet A). Then include any points of learning or potential ideas for future improvements in the "Possible Improvements" column found under Step One. Discuss these, noting those ideas that have the greatest support. This is information that will be drawn on to help determine and document a final list of recommendations for improvements in Step Three.

Step Two. Next, review and discuss the four questions in the Step Two section of this Worksheet (D). These are important overarching questions about the public engagement process that will be particularly appropriate for local officials or for commissions or other local bodies who are charged with improving public engagement. Note any ideas for improvement as these may also become part of the final list of recommendations determined in Step Three.

Step Three. Finally, use the Step Three section of Worksheet D to discuss the ideas for improvements developed under Step One and Step Two and to determine and document the final decisions about the improvements you think would have the greatest positive impacts on your city's or county's next public engagement process.

You may also wish to use the information from this worksheet in follow-up communication with your recent public engagement participants. It is important that public engagement process participants know how their ideas, recommendations and evaluative comments were used by decision makers.

Process Improvement Worksheet D

Step One: Discuss and document ideas from Comparison Worksheet C or brainstorm new ideas for improvement based on Worksheet A and B Responses.

STATEMENT	POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS
PREPARATION	
1. The notice, advertisement and/or invitation to participate was clear and welcoming.	
2. Information about the meeting topic, provided to attendees before or at the meeting, helped prepare them to participate more effectively.	
3. The purpose of the meeting was clear to participants.	
4. Before the meeting, participants believed their <i>individual</i> views would be seriously considered by policymakers.	
5. Before the meeting, participants believed their <i>collective</i> views or recommendations would be seriously considered by policymakers.	
PARTICIPANTS	
6. The participants in the meeting reflected the diversity of the people and views of our community.	
7. The mix of participants was appropriate for the subject matter of the meeting.	
8. Participants felt comfortable with the other participants.	
9. Meeting participants treated each other respectfully.	
10. Meeting participants felt that other participants were constructive in their comments.	

STATEMENT	IMPROVEMENT
PROCESS	
11. The agenda and process for the meeting were appropriate for the topic and helped make the meeting productive.	
12. There was sufficient opportunity for participants to express their views about what they thought was important.	
13. There was sufficient opportunity for participants to exchange views and learn from each other.	
14. There was sufficient opportunity for participants to develop joint views and/or recommendations.	
15. The facilitator(s) provided a safe, fair, and well-managed environment for participants.	
RESULTS	
16. Participants changed their thinking about the topic as a result of this public engagement process.	
17. Participants believe that this meeting will result in better decisions on the topic discussed	
18. It was clear to participants how decision makers will use the results of this meeting.	
19. If asked, those attending would participate in meetings like this again.	
20. Participants would encourage other residents to participate in similar public engagement processes on this or other appropriate topics.	

Step Two: Additional Assessment Questions

These questions are not intended for tabulation but for discussion to help assess the overall success of a public engagement activity/process. These questions generally extend beyond the subject matter of the previous worksheets.

1.	A Plan? Did appropriate local officials develop and approve a clear public engagement plan that included: a stated purpose, participation goals, a process design, a timeline, clear local official and staff roles, a budget, ties to any larger city or county public engagement goals, and how local officials would integrate recommendations into their ultimate decision making? Also, was there early input into the public engagement plan or design from members of intended participant communities? How could this public engagement plan have been improved?
2.	Internal Communications? Were you satisfied with the communications between and among appropriate local agency officials, staff and consultants (if any) during the public engagement process? How could this have been improved?
3.	External Communications? Were you satisfied with the external communications to the larger public during the public engagement process; to present the results of the process; or to communicate how decision makers used the information generated by the public? How could this have been improved?
4.	Policy Impacts? Do you believe the ultimate decisions made by the appropriate local agency or governing body were different and/or better than would have been the case without the public engagement activity/process? If yes, how so? How could this have been improved?

Step Three: Priority Recommendations to Improve Public Engagement

Describe clearly the *priority* actions to be taken to make the identified improvements in your public engagement activities. Where appropriate, include the individuals/positions responsible for implementation. Add more than five if you wish

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	