

## Army Public Involvement

### SEVEN BASIC STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

**General.** There are seven basic steps to consider when planning for public involvement. Army commanders and staffs should exercise judgement and carefully consider the particular circumstances of each situation in determining how to implement these steps. They should strive to provide the most meaningful public involvement activities appropriate to each situation, and assess thoroughly the issues at stake. Things to consider as part of this assessment are:

- The locations,
- Potential environmental and human health consequences of Army activities,
- Potential for controversy,
- Specific needs of the public and the Army, and
- Other unique or special circumstances (e.g., local norms, relevant history).

Enhanced opportunities for public involvement should be created clearly for those situations in which there is the potential for greater environmental or human health consequences of controversy. Having said that, it is nevertheless important for the Army to set priorities for its use of resources, and that budgetary constraints and or a pressing national emergency may affect implementation of any of these elements, each of which is discussed in the following sections.

**1. Plan and Budget for Public Involvement Activities.** When planning for training or other mission operations, Army commanders and staffs should provide resources and time dedicated to public involvement activities, and the personnel and resources to provide technical assistance to the involved public where appropriate. These activities may be included in planning documents, existing community outreach efforts, and the portion of the public affairs program aimed at internal Army audiences. Budget documents should include resources for public involvement in addition to the resources allotted to other mission components. Planning documents should include as appropriate:

- Key decisions subject to public involvement, with significant intermediate decisionmaking points (e.g., issue identification, developing options, assessing impacts, and evaluating or choosing options);
- Staff and budget for public involvement;
- Objectives of public involvement in the project or decision;
- Appropriate level of public involvement (e.g., does the issue warrant basic information dissemination, interactive consultation, or more collaborative approaches?);
- Segments of the public targeted for public involvement and plans for identifying affected organizations and individuals;

- Opportunities that help participants gain an adequate understanding of financial, technical, and other information relevant to the proposed program or decision;
- Proposed schedule for public involvement activities consistent with the timing of the planning and decisionmaking process;
- Mechanisms to implement other basic steps for public involvement (see following sections) and ensure linkage of proposed actions to such critical documents and planning processes as the Army's transformation strategy, *The Army Strategy for the Environment*, and the *Army Public Involvement Campaign Plan*;
- Measures or methods to evaluate the effectiveness of public involvement.

Major subordinate commands (MACOMs) should prepare their own plans to support *The Army Strategy for the Environment*, and the *Army Public Involvement Campaign Plan*, which should include the items discussed above.

**2. Identify the Interested and Affected Public.** The goal in this step is to identify the groups or members of the public who may have expressed an interest in or, who, by nature of their location, purposes or activities, may be affected by an upcoming Army program or decision. For each program, activity, or project, the Army should develop a *contact list*, and add to the list those members of the public who request they be added. The list should be updated frequently – particularly if the potential for public interest is likely to be intense and/or controversial – and include the full range of interested and affected parties. Lists are most useful if subdivided by category of interest or geographic area. The Army should use these lists to send announcements of involvement opportunities, to include:

- Notices of meetings;
- Hearings;
- Briefings, open-houses, and related events;
- Notices of available information (e.g., reports and documents); and
- Identify members of the public serving on advisory committees and related activities.

Contact lists can be constructed in a variety of ways:

- Sign-up rosters at Army-sponsored workshops, community meetings, or public events, where participants are invited to request additional information on the particular program, activity, or project;
- Participating in community- or other agency-sponsored meetings, workshops, and hearings, where participants are invited to request additional information from the Army on a particular program, activity, or project;
- Encouraging other organizations to publicize Army activities;
- Using questionnaires or surveys to find out levels of awareness and the need for tailored public education and outreach;

- Including an Army point-of-contact on documents, so that individuals may seek to be placed on lists;
- Soliciting interest through notices in the Federal Register; trade and trade association publications; local print, radio, cable, and television outlets; not-for-profit secular and religious publications; or through the Internet or other electronic means;
- Asking participants at Army-sponsored events what, if any, interests are missing; and
- Using libraries, churches, schools, or other centers where the community congregates.

Compiling contact lists can raise legitimate privacy concerns, and therefore Army commanders and staffs must exercise sound discretion in compiling them. They should make it clear to affected parties that their names will not be added to a mailing list without their explicit permission, nor will the list be used to create profiles on specific individuals, or shared with other organizations and used for purposes other than the nature for which the lists are intended.

**3. Provide technical or financial assistance to facilitate public involvement.** The goals in this step are to improve public involvement opportunities by providing technical or financial assistance, when available and appropriate, to external stakeholders, small local governments, and members of the public, to facilitate public understanding of complex issues and enable people, who could not otherwise do so, to participate substantively in the planning and decisionmaking process.

Thus, it is important, as a first step, for Army commanders and staffs to recognize, as early in the cycle as possible, situations in Army programs, projects, or impending decisions where substantial commitments of time, energy, and resources will be required for study, research, analysis, and discussion by the public, and where:

- The underlying scientific or technical attributes of a proposed program, project, or decision may be overly complex and difficult for non-Army members to understand; and
- Members of the affected public may not have the requisite knowledge or resources to participate, or obtain the subject-matter expertise to engage in meaningful involvement.

As with the development and maintenance of contact lists, discussed earlier, actions in this area may be constrained by legal requirements and/or the limited availability of funds. Knowledgeable staff (e.g., the Staff Judge Advocate, Surgeon General, Comptroller, and Environmental Program Office), and outside consultants, however, can help commanders determine methods of assistance appropriate to the situation and which meet applicable legal requirements. Methods may include:

- Access to Army experts or contractors to obtain information and analyses as resources allow;
- Access to technical personnel through grants to or cooperative relationships with local universities and research laboratories;

- Task-specific technical assistance to help stakeholders address issues either in project negotiation or implementation phases of projects;
- Collection and dissemination of information on outside sources of funding or technical assistance (e.g., The EPA, could be in a position to issue affected parties Technical Assistance Grants (TAGs) under Section 117 of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). TAGs are awarded to groups of individuals who may be affected by a release or threatened release at Superfund sites to obtain assistance in interpreting and disseminating data related to site activities; and
- Provision of surpluses computer equipment to parties needing access to the Internet.

In some limited circumstances, direct financial assistance may be appropriate and authorized, such as in the issuance of invitational travel orders for select stakeholders to provide information and advice directly to Army officials or compensation for time spent on an Army-sponsored advisory committee. As a general rule, the focus of financial (and technical) assistance should be on groups who need it the most and could not afford to participate meaningfully without such assistance.

**4. Provide Information and Outreach to the Public.** Key goals in providing information and outreach to the public are to:

- Provide the public with access to accurate, understandable, pertinent, and timely information to facilitate effective involvement in Army planning and decisionmaking processes; and
- Assist the public in understanding the reasons for Army action, the legal framework for decisionmaking, and the significance of related technical data so that the public can provide meaningful comments.

To these ends, Army commanders and staffs should, whenever possible, provide:

- The public with adequate and timely information concerning a forthcoming action or decision;
- Policy, program, and/or technical information to the affected public and other interested parties at the earliest practicable times for the purpose of enabling these groups to make informed and constructive contributions to decisionmaking;
- Information at places easily accessible to interested and affected persons or organizations (e.g., Army and Installation Webs, town meetings, church and community newsletters, participation at community fairs and festivals);
- Integrated, on-line, user-friendly access to health and environmental data and information to the extent practicable;
- Information that clearly identifies the role of the public in the specific decisions to be made; and

- Tours of relevant sites and facilities.

Information and outreach documents, together with engineering and technical publications for distribution, should be written in language the public and other government agencies will easily understand. Complex technical materials should be provided in summary form, and consideration should be given to whether some publications should be provided in languages other than English. Other communications media (e.g., television, video conferencing, on-line chat rooms and other Internet-based fora, and presentations at community events) should follow these same principles.

See also “Department of the Army Environmental Style Guide,” “Public Involvement Checklist,” and the “Public Involvement Guide,” which appear either in separate form on-line, or as annexes to the *Army Public Involvement Campaign Plan*, for additional information, to include suggestions on developing and implementing effective outreach initiatives.

**5. Conduct Public Consultation and Involvement Activities.** Conducting public consultation and involvement activities enables the Army to receive a better understanding of the interests and needs of the affected public, which, alone, is a useful adjunct to planning and decisionmaking. At the same time, these activities provide for the exchange of information and views and open exploration of issues, alternatives, and consequences, with the potential this represents for a more informed, less costly, and more widely supported Army decisions. To achieve these goals, Army commanders and staffs should *organize* for public consultation and involvement.

This means:

- Identifying and selecting public consultation or involvement processes appropriate to the decision under consideration and the time and resources available;
- Consulting or involving the affected parties to ensure the approaches selected consider and, if appropriate, accommodate the needs, preferences, schedules, and resources of potentially affected parties;
- Notifying the public of potential consultation and involvement activities early enough to ensure the public has adequate time to obtain and evaluate information, consult experts, and formulate and express their opinions, options, and suggestions prior to the Army’s action;
- For site-specific activities, starting public involvement efforts early in the action and continue them, as appropriate, until the completion of all work;
- Conducting public consultation and involvement activities at times and places that, to the maximum extent feasible, facilitate attendance or involvement by the affected parties (e.g., evenings or weekends, locations accessible via public transportation and to people in need of special assistance);
- Using third-parties (e.g., neutral facilitators or trained mediators) to assist in the development and implementation of the project or decision;

- Providing guidance, resources, training, and professional assistance to Army staffs and delegated partners (e.g., contractors) to assist them in better understanding the rationale and the “how to’s” of effective public involvement.

As with other Army programs, good resource management suggests making maximum use of existing facilities, programs, and processes to accomplish public consultation and involvement rather than creating additional bureaucratic layers or spending scant funds unwisely.

Additionally, it is important not to allow public consultation or involvement degenerate into one-way communication (e.g., newsletters, announcements, exhibits) with little meaningful opportunities for public comment and involvement. More *interactive* methods of involvement, ranging from two-way exchanges of information to more collaborative methods that result in stakeholder-defined solutions – in addition to the communicating tools and techniques available traditionally to Army public affairs offices. Common examples include:

- Public meetings and hearings;
- Advisory committees; and
- Legally-binding negotiated agreements.

**6. Review and Use Input, and Provide Feedback to the Public.** To consistently earn the public’s trust and to be seen as credible partners in national security and environmental sustainability, Army commanders and staffs should wherever possible communicate to the public the decisions made and how public input affected these decisions. For each decision, Army officials should attempt to find a balance that permits mission accomplishment and consideration of expressed opinions, alternatives, and recommendations of affected parties. An effective military program should, in any case, consider readiness and environmental requirements as *integral* to total mission accomplishment, and limit, where possible, adverse environmental impacts resulting from the decision. In providing feedback to the public, a variety of methods can be employed, as shown in some of the previous steps, and generally include some of the basic methods for receiving feedback.

**7. Evaluate Public Involvement Activities.** Army officials should also use surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other tools to evaluate whether public involvement activities are performed appropriately and have the intended effects. Surveys should also be directed at internal Army audiences to assess how best the program can be improved. Performance measures should be established for each of the public involvement activities employed by the command and used as a basis for program reviews and the improvements necessary in policy, strategy, and process to make public involvement a way of doing business that benefits both the public and the Army.