
MEMORANDUM

TO: CHRIS FRENCH, USFS DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICIAL
FROM: NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2012 NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM LAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING RULE
SUBJECT: OBSERVATIONS ON EFFECTIVE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
DATE: AUGUST 15, 2016
CC: COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (Committee) offers the following **‘Observations on Effective Public Engagement’**. The Committee supports the 2012 Rule’s requirements to provide robust, transparent and balanced public participation opportunities within forest planning.

Over the past four years, the Committee has had the opportunity to hear from many forests and a broad range of stakeholders involved in plan revision efforts across the country. Through these conversations, the Committee has gathered a great deal of information on public engagement from revision forests and stakeholders across the country. The following list highlights the lessons learned. The Committee believes that the attached list provides useful information for current revision forests and those yet to begin plan revision on ways to support and facilitate successful forest planning public engagement.

Because each national forest has varying ecological, social and economic conditions and unique stakeholders, the Committee does not recommend a ‘one size fits all’ approach to public engagement. Rather, the Committee recommends that the Forest Service engage marketing and/or public relations professionals to use the following list to develop a useful toolset that displays a menu of options that forests can reference as they navigate the public engagement process.

**National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule
Observations on Effective Public Engagement**

INTRODUCTION: The National Advisory Committee (Committee) for the 2012 Planning Rule was chartered to give advice and recommendations on implementation of the rule. The Committee believes that effective public engagement is vital to the success of forest plan revisions and the rule itself. Over the past four years, the Committee has had the opportunity to hear from many forests and a broad range of stakeholders involved in plan revision efforts across the country. Through these conversations, the Committee has gathered a great deal of information on public engagement. The following list highlights the key challenges that forest planning teams and stakeholders have identified. The list also includes corresponding potential solutions offered by forest planning teams, stakeholders and/or Committee members to address these challenges. This list should be seen as a living document to be refined and added to as implementation proceeds.

Because each national forest has varying ecological, social and economic conditions and unique stakeholders, the Committee does not recommend a ‘one size fits all’ approach to public engagement. Rather, the Committee recommends that the Forest Service engage marketing and/or public relations professionals to use the following list to develop a useful toolset that displays a menu of options that forests can reference as they navigate the public engagement process. The Committee looks forward to continuing to work with the agency on refining effective public engagement strategies.

The Committee requests that the agency provide updates from the field on successes and/or challenges associated with implementation of these recommendations every six months.

AUDIENCE: Forest Service Washington Office, Regional Offices and National Forests preparing for /or currently in the revision process.

Challenge	Potential Solutions/Considerations
Need for collaborative capacity	Consider forming a small, standing advisory committee that would maintain collaborative energy over time, occasionally scaling up to meet discreet planning efforts.
	Engage in the full spectrum of public engagement strategies: (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower).
	Prior to commencing revisions, create focus groups made up of private citizens to support the process.
	Consider establishing a Federal Advisory Committee for plan revision efforts (similar to the Tongass Advisory Committee).
	Educate agency staff and partners on FACA guidelines. In some areas, the fear of violations may be marginalizing effective collective problem-solving.
	Provide public engagement and collaborative training for forest staff prior to plan revision so they are well prepared and skill sets are in place to avoid ‘cold starts’.
	Prior to initiating a revision, forest staff leverage current partnership and relationships.
	Host a Leaders as Conveners session for partners to help build capacity.
Need for youth and underserved community engagement	Reach out to local teachers and ask them to incorporate elements of the planning process into their curricula.
	Engage students by asking: How do you use the national forest? Where do you like to go in the national forest? How would you like to see the national forest managed for your future?
	Hold an essay contest for grader schoolers on: ‘What the forest means to me’

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	Sponsor job shadowing and leadership training for local students.
	Invite students to map their values and interests.
	Where applicable, engage college students in planning by hosting discussions on issues such as: climate change, forest health, etc.
	Leverage local youth work crews. These groups can be invaluable in developing relationships with youth.
	To be inclusive, advertise meetings in interest-based language targeted to the groups that need to be engaged.
	Reach out to leaders within the community for assistance in engaging youth and underserved populations.
	Allow some Forest Service staff to wear street clothes to public meetings (rather than uniforms and badges).
	Use social media to engage youth and other interest groups.
	Build trust with youth and underserved communities. This takes time, effort and repeat visits. It requires care to structure interactions in terms that relate directly to a group’s interests and concerns about the forests. This begins with outreach and education on the contributions of forests to daily life (e.g clean water) and extends into inviting youth and underserved communities to apply for careers with the USFS. (http://www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us)
Need for tribal and local government involvement	The goal of tribal and intergovernmental participation should be to identify opportunities to contribute to mutual objectives, resolve or reduce conflicts and achieve mutually agreeable outcomes.
	Share the Government Guides with local governments and tribes to help them better understand the forest plan revision process and their opportunities for engagement. (http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd508232.pdf)
	Prior to commencing a revision effort, forest should have a firm understanding of the various types of intergovernmental engagement outlined in the rule; be prepared to fully explain these to representatives of State, local, and tribal governments; and assist them in determining the role most appropriate to their interests and resources.
	Prior to commencing plan revisions, establish good intergovernmental coordination (including federal agencies) to ensure all-lands connectivity. Government coordination should be organized around issues that cross jurisdictions and expertise.
	Formalize agreed-upon engagement processes in a memorandum of understanding to avoid later confusion and misunderstandings.
	Designate one or more individuals on the planning team to be the primary contact for participating governmental entities.
	Assist participating entities with developing good communication strategies for how to best relate to their constituencies.
	Whenever possible, attending meetings when participating entities request Forest Service presence.
	Employ full-time tribal relations directors to maintain respectful and appropriate government-to-government relations with tribes. As an example, the intersection of US and Tribal law, (e.g water law), is complex enough to require a high level of communication.
	Invite tribal partners and local governments to participate as Cooperating Agencies and as ID Teams members.

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Need to effectively address contentious situations	Provide informal spaces, in addition to formal settings, for the public to communicate with each other and the forest to develop relationships.
	Emphasize common ground to help build shared identity.
	Offer opportunities for participants to take on increasing responsibility. This helps build sustainable engagement and ownership of the process.
	Periodically express gratitude and demonstrate respect for time and effort given by the public.
	Set up space for respectful discourse in large meeting settings and work towards common ground. Structure meetings to allow for workgroup settings rather than large public forums. Challenge constituents to come up with solutions to their opponent’s problems while still meeting their needs; this helps foster creative thinking.
	Provide opportunities for shared learning within the public and agency in order to create balanced plans that have public support – informing, not educating.
	Hire 3 rd party facilitators to help develop public engagement strategies and facilitate public meetings. The Forest Service can attend and participate, but shouldn’t lead the discussions.
	Include both economic and social science information in planning. A human-wellbeing-centric focus is crucial for gauging the potential effects of management decisions. Economists can help quantify the benefits received from forests in monetary/economic terms.
	Start by reminding everyone what we value from the Forest, such as clean air, clean water, wildlife, recreation, wood products, etc. Building this platform will remove some of the stigma or perception of other people.
	Address potential tension between local collaboratives and national interests with a comprehensive multi-tiered participation approach.
Develop a transparent process. Ground decisions in Best Available Science (BASI). Share rationale and supporting BASI documents with the public.	
Need for greater public engagement in planning, including new audiences	Conduct adequate pre-planning sensing. Invite key stakeholders to discuss how they obtain information (newspaper, email, etc) and how do they want to be engaged (meetings, on-line, etc)
	Establish a non-agency Public Participation Advisory Committee to help the forest develop a robust public involvement strategy.
	To reach diverse audiences, host multiple meetings in varied locations, hold meetings in the evening and on weekends and/or offer on-line collaboration tools.
	Be sensitive to language and culture (Plain speak vs. plan speak). Get rid of acronyms and buzz words!!
	Employ advanced communication competencies (Strong involvement of Public Affairs Officer and outside Institutes. Use a 3 rd party facilitator)
	Use radio stations and talk shows to get the message out.
Use metaphors that work for the audience (Ex: Make the connection between forest plans and county zoning plans)	

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	<p>“Take the mountain to Mohammad” – The same old techniques will reach the same old audiences. Actively recruit new sectors while maintaining relationships with traditional partners.</p> <p>Create a series of web-based ads that are image rich but not content heavy. This tool can be used to reach new audiences. Ads should be eye catching to grab people’s attention. The goal is to entice people to think about themselves in relation to planning. The main message should be: “Forests are important; get involved”. The ads can also be used to alert the public about planning meetings. “Did you know that this is happening? Come to the meeting”. The ads can be used by forests via their websites or email lists. User groups can also forward the information to their members. Create different versions to appeal to different sectors. Disseminate these ads through social media and other avenues. Create a YouTube channel that is solely dedicated to planning.</p> <p>Create key messaging for Target Audiences to encourage Engagement in Forest Planningⁱ</p> <p>Give meetings a non-agency feel. Have local community leaders open meetings.</p> <p>Engage groups by attending their events, ex. a local snowmobile club’s dinner may be an excellent venue to get into a discussion – it doesn’t always have to be a formal gathering. (Girl/Boy Scout banquets, recreation clubs’ dinners/fundraisers, local ski areas – get creative).</p> <p>Create a series of ‘Planning 101’ Video(s) – conveying to the American people the importance of our national forests and explaining the role of forest planning in protecting and managing these public resources.</p> <p>Develop planning documents that are concise and easy to read.</p> <p>Approach leaders of social organizations to assist with outreach; create community advocates.</p> <p>When feasible, provide funding to communities to support outreach and engagement.</p> <p>Encourage forests to develop a decision framework, outlining methodological protocols in order to facilitate partner contributions to data collection.</p> <p>Define terms in everyday language, describing: “What is the concern, why is it important, and what are the management options?” This should not be seen as a dumbing down, but a way to make information accessible and relevant to the public.</p>
	<p>Provide video teleconferencing to obtain input opportunities for those who could not participate in meetings in person.</p>
Need to clearly explain the revision process to the public	<p>Share the Citizens’ and Government Guides with interested members of the public, local governments and tribes to help them better understand the forest plan revision process and their opportunities for engagement. (Citizens’ Guide: http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd515424.pdf; Government Guide: http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd515427.pdf)</p>
	<p>Clearly explain process sideboards and guidelines and educate participants about the planning process early and often. Key guidelines include the role of best available science, the relationship between collaboration and decision making, the role of facilitators, and what can be expected at each stage of the planning process. Planners may want to ask participants what they expect of the process to align expectations early on.</p>
	<p>Clearly explain the scope of plan vs project level decisions and outcomes.</p>
	<p>Continually pause within the process and assess if you are getting the information you need –If not, change tacks.</p>

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	Clearly articulate why the forest is seeking input and how it will be used.
	Explain to lease holders the opportunities they have to discuss the plan revision and how they will be affected by decisions.
	Clearly describe and communicate roles, responsibilities, goals, objectives, and expectations for participants, USFS staff, and the planning process. Explain clearly what the FS is asking from the public – i.e. we don't want people to have the impression that they have to ground-truth the wilderness inventory because the FS won't do it. The FS needs to be very clear when formal feedback is desired vs. informal feedback.
	Draft concise planning documents in plain language so that publics can understand and feel ownership in the process.
Need to keep the public motivated and engaged throughout the planning process (avoid burn out)	Respect people's time. It is not realistic to expect people to stay engaged throughout—there will be peaks and valleys in interests.
	Clearly explain the role of the assessment – to avoid the need for a 'kitchen sink' approach.
	Develop meeting agendas that are sustainable, including breaks, meals and other informal space to communicate and develop relationships.
	Provide different formats for meetings, including world cafés to allow for greater input and dialogue; listen to stakeholders (rather than always presenting information). This type of engagement will help foster ownership in the process and plan.
	Start conversations by addressing the why (wildfire risk, subsistence, recreation), then pivot to the plan revision.
	Ensure that planning teams include member(s) with outreach expertise.
	Consider and adequately respond to the relevant information provided by the public. When the public feels that they are being heard, there is a greater likelihood that they will stay engaged.
	Improve transitions between outgoing and incoming forest personnel who will assume the responsibility for working directly with partners and publics by using the 'Handover Memo' or other communication tool.
	Reduce agency turnover during plan revisions by supporting staff and/or creating incentives for staff to remain.
	Maintain communication via emails and websites. The USFS should not disappear during plan writing. The formal NEPA process should not inhibit public engagement.
	Clearly define the role of the assessment, the limits of planning, what input is needed at what stage, and how public input will be used.
	Create multiple opportunities for the public to be engaged. Clearly explain that people do not need to attend everything; explain how people can submit substantive comments, at what points in the process and how they will be used. It was observed that many people like public meetings while others submit only written comments. The public needs to be made aware of the multiple modes of participation available to them. There is a need to respect people who don't do for their full time job. Ask for support from respected local representatives to help explain the process to stakeholders.
	Ensure that all planning documents are well organized, succinct and focus on the key issues.
Describe how stakeholders can assist with subsequent implementation and monitoring.	

ⁱ Key Messaging for Target Audiences to encourage Engagement in Forest Planning

Goal: To direct the public to the on-line Citizens' and Government Guides for the 2012 Planning Rule to encourage greater engagement by a diverse group of stakeholders.

General Key Messages:

"This is your opportunity to":

- Understand how the Forest Plan will affect forest management for the next 15-20 years.
- Work towards balancing needs (ecology, economics, and social values) within the National Forest System – including balanced solutions for the multiple uses.
- Provide specific input on:
 - what the desired conditions and future vision of the forest should be
 - cultural/historical information about the national forest
 - your particular interest and how it integrates with forest planning and other interests
- Help the forest identify the following areas that are required within a forest plan:
 - Candidate for wilderness and/or wild and scenic river designation
 - Suitable for Timber Harvest
 - Important for wildlife habitat
 - Degraded and in need of restoration
 - At risk for invasive weeds
 - Provide important access
 - Important recreation sites (motorized and non-motorized)
- Build relationships with other members of the community and Forest Service staff.
- Gain a better understanding of:
 - other people's viewpoints
 - how science is being used to craft these plans
 - the tangible and intangible benefits of the national forests
 - ecosystems Services such as carbon sequestration and water storage/filtration and supply
 - how the forest plan will coordinate with counties and landowners (e.g. response to wildfire)

Potential Audiences (note: audience members will probably fall into multiple audience categories):

- Hunters
- Anglers

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- Non-Timber Commodity Users
- Timber Purchasers
- Biomass Purchasers
- Motorized Users
- Non-Motorized Users
- Environmental Organizations
- Watershed Organizations
- Grazing / agricultural users
- Native American Tribes
- Mining Interests
- Communities of Place
- County Governments
- State Agencies
- Internal Forest Service Staff
- Youth
- Urban Communities
- Minorities
- Underserved Communities
- Academics/Universities
- Disabled

Outreach Methods:

- Social Media (Twitter/Facebook)
- Traditional 'Snail' Mail
- Email Contacts
- Chambers of Commerce
- Identification of Community Spokespersons/Leaders to assist in outreach planning
- Personal Contact (deliberate relationship building)
- School Field Trips
- Print Media Campaign (buses, subways, etc.)
- Website Engagement
- Collateral (fliers, pamphlets, etc)