



1. INVOLVING CITIZENS ... WHAT METHOD IS BEST?

Successful communities understand that the success of a community self assessment is determined by the commitment of those participating in the process, not by the process itself. The six most widely used methods for gathering inputs are:

- ⊙ Public hearings
- ⊙ Study or subcommittees
- ⊙ Surveys or questionnaires
- ⊙ Facilitated meetings
- ⊙ Citizen participation programs
- ⊙ Focus groups

Each method offers distinct advantages and disadvantages. Most communities find that a combination of the various methods works best to obtain the highest level of citizen input and quality information:

Public Hearings - do a good job of informing the public and drawing media attention. The communication tends to be one-way and it is difficult to obtain input

Surveys - can be useful in particular cases and are very good at determining general areas of public concern. It is difficult to obtain detailed information and in all cases it is critical to obtain professional help in the drafting and interpretation of questions.

Study Groups - are a good method of focusing on details and making recommendations on goals, objectives and strategies. They are not good at building consensus.

Facilitated Meetings - are an excellent way to build consensus, draw media attention, create buy-in from constituents, establish general goals and objectives, and motivate the community towards action. They are a poor method to use when focusing on details.

Citizen Participation Programs - are a good method of gathering ideas, gaining support and developing ownership, and can be timed to coincide with community events including fairs, school functions, festivals, civic events, and special promotions

Focus Groups - are good for determining details for implementation of specific projects. They are not as valuable in setting general goals, objectives or use with large numbers of people.