


IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



Increasing Level of Public Impact 

Public participation goal

Inform

To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

Consult

To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

Involve

To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Collaborate

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Empower

To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Promise to the public

We will keep you informed.

We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.

We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.

We will implement what you decide.

Example techniques

- Fact sheets
- Web sites
- Open houses

- Public comment
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Public meetings

- Workshops
- Deliberative polling

- Citizen advisory committees
- Consensus-building
- Participatory decision-making

- Citizen juries
- Ballots
- Delegated decision

Dealing with Deeply Held Concerns and other Challenges to Public Engagement Processes

Public Engagement Challenges

Differences of opinion about land use plans, budgets, employee pensions, public safety, sustainability, transportation options, affordable housing and other topics can trigger strong concerns and emotions held by community residents and groups. At times, local agencies and officials may themselves be the main topic of heated public discussions.

Public engagement processes are often forums for a broad spectrum of input. In some cases, public engagement participants will have very strongly held views about:

- The topics to be discussed;
- The local (or regional) agency and officials involved; and/or
- The public engagement process itself.

Such deeply held concerns can present challenges to a local agency sponsoring or organizing a public engagement process. It is important to make sure that these concerns are addressed effectively, to ensure the opportunity for all perspectives to be heard.

Designing and facilitating a discussion among people who have significantly different perspectives and deep feelings about an issue is both a skill and an art. The following ideas can help in designing and preparing for public engagement processes that are effective, responsive and civil - even when participants hold very strong views. Of course, local and regional agency public engagement plans and responses will be contingent on the time, staff and financial resources available.

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Know Your Likely Participants

As part of the public engagement planning process, try to anticipate and understand:

- Participants' likely concerns and interests.
- Gaps in the information they are likely to have about the topic of discussion.

It is helpful to know your public engagement participants and their views. Organized stakeholders and interest groups tend to hold strong views, while members of the public may have more varied opinions. To better understand the viewpoints of your audience:

- Talk with colleagues at other local and regional agencies to better understand what challenges and strong public sentiments surfaced during their public engagement activities. Ask which engagement-related approaches worked and which did not.
- Consider the range of goals participants have in attending the public engagement meeting. Some participants will welcome opportunities for dialogue and deliberation with their neighbors. Others may primarily want the opportunity to: 1) ask questions; 2) make their views known; and/or 3) raise objections to the public engagement or planning process itself.

Plan, Prepare and Provide Information

Meetings that involve individuals and groups with very different and deeply held perspectives on the issues, on the role of government, and on public engagement itself, require careful planning. It is helpful to:

- Meet with groups and organizations likely to have strongly held views early in the design process. This may help to better understand views and concerns and to solicit input on process design that will enable all participants to be heard. In some cases, forming a public engagement advisory committee may be helpful.
- Plan and hold selected public engagement activities in partnership with groups and organizations that have earned the community's respect.
- Demonstrate a commitment to seeking public views by offering opportunities for early input into the matters under consideration.
- Try to ensure that participants adequately reflect the diverse population and viewpoints of the affected community.

- Be especially clear in all communications about public engagement meeting purposes and processes, as well as about when, how and by whom final decisions will be made.
- If possible, provide appropriate background information to participants before and during the meeting to help prepare for informed participation.
- Identify and use impartial meeting facilitators and leaders who will not have, or be perceived as having, a bias. This may encourage greater trust in the process and broader participation.
- When using speakers to introduce issues and provide perspectives on topics present a broad spectrum of views.
- Prepare staff and facilitators to be comfortable with strongly expressed opinions and confrontational behavior. Provide staff and facilitators with possible options and responses if participants challenge meeting ground rules, processes and/or content. Facilitators should be courteous even if challenged and flexible as circumstances require.
- If concerns arise about potential safety and security issues at a meeting, staff and facilitators should know who will make decisions about any agenda changes or whether a participant should be asked to leave. Bear in mind that the in some cases, visible presence of law enforcement personnel may discourage full participation or further escalate tensions.

Design an Appropriate Process

Various public engagement process designs support and/or allow opportunities for different kinds of public input. Some meeting design elements are particularly important when issues are significantly controversial and contested. Consider the following ideas:

- Design processes that attempt to meet the reasonable participation needs of those likely to attend. This may include: agendas that include time for questions and answers, individual comments, small group discussion and collective discussions. However, be *very realistic* about the time you need if you pursue such multi-faceted approaches. Sometimes separate and/or serial public engagement activities may be called for. In some cases, an earlier meeting that allows for more individual comments, questions and answers, can be followed by a meeting (or meetings) with opportunities for more collective scenario discussions and planning.
- If your goal is to try to find common ground across very deeply held and strongly felt differences, the process or processes you choose must be designed for that purpose. Typically, this will require: buy-in from key stakeholders about the process and its purpose; well thought out and accepted ground rules; competent and trusted facilitation; attention to relationship building among participants; and multiple meetings with opportunities for frank dialogue and deliberation. It is also important to include participants who reflect the views of the greater community.

- Frame and publicize the *purpose* of the public engagement meeting/activity in a way that clarifies your goals, the information you plan to share, and the sort of public knowledge you are seeking.
- Allow enough time in the agenda to explain what will be accomplished during the current meeting, and to present an overview of the decision-making process, individual roles and responsibilities and how public input will be incorporated.
- Present issues and scenarios to be discussed in ways that acknowledge underlying policy history and assumptions.
- Be careful of presenting a closed set of predetermined scenarios or choices to participants. It is generally best, to give participants the opportunity to identify other options or to express a “none of the above” preference. If the scenarios presented are the result of previous public engagement efforts, make that clear.
- Provide sources and background information when presenting data and other information to the public so people can verify it for themselves.
- At times, it can be useful to start with a less controversial topic or a more do-able piece of work and then move into more difficult and controversial issues. This may increase the public’s confidence in the process and commitment to address the larger issues.
- Consider including options for online input and discussion in the overall public engagement strategy. This allows additional choices for participation and may help secure a broader range of perspectives from the community.
- Create participant worksheets that allow meeting attendees to offer more detailed individual comments and ideas.
- If the agenda includes an opportunity for public comment and a large number of participants are expected, consider limiting the comment time allowed for each individual so that all can be heard. In some cases, key questions may be identified in small groups and then asked in the larger group.
- Determine how any collected comments, discussion elements or recommendations will be recorded and documented and where and when they will be available.

Transparency in Public Engagement

At the public engagement meeting be clear about ground rules and each activity's purpose. Maintain a respectful, impartial and firm tone and manner. Stay flexible to meet unexpected challenges. Consider the following ideas:

- Early in the meeting, briefly describe the overall agency decision-making process, the various opportunities for public input, the goal of the meeting and how the input will be used. This should include the roles and responsibilities for ultimate decision-making, implementation and/or action by the local or regional agencies involved.
- Explain, as appropriate, the roles of others at the meeting including: local or other public officials or agency staff, presenters, facilitators, media, etc.
- Describe the meeting ground rules and the values and behaviors they are intended to promote (such as respect and fairness). Ask participants to agree to observe the ground rules. If someone objects or refuses to agree, ask if the rest of the group agrees. If there is substantial objection or confusion, further discussion may be required. If one or two people out of a large group raise concerns, these should also be addressed. However, if no closure can be achieved in a few minutes, state that the ground rules accepted by most meeting attendees will be in effect and all are asked to follow them. It will then be the meeting organizers' responsibility to determine which, if any, ground rule "violations" that occur need to be identified; this may result in someone being asked to leave.
- If participants will be asked to sign in or identify themselves before speaking, explain the purpose this serves for both speakers and listeners.
- For question or comment periods, indicate whether participants will be called upon directly or asked to submit question/comment cards. Some individuals may object to the use of comment cards, believing their contributions will not be as effective if they are grouped with others' or expressed by someone other than themselves.
- Acknowledge that there are likely to be disagreements. Encourage participants to practice active listening to ensure that people feel heard. Active listening techniques include repeating what one has heard, asking for clarification, avoiding the use of accusatory language and refraining from questioning someone's motives or integrity.

Negative, Emotional or Challenging Comments

Some discussions may become loud and passionate. Rude or insulting comments may be made. Some participants may challenge the public engagement process or the overarching decision making process of the local agency. It is important to listen carefully, use good judgment and respond specifically to what is being said. For example:

- Encourage and practice active listening. Be respectful. Do not respond in kind to derogatory or insulting comments.
- Identify and respond to the substance of the question or comment rather than to its tone (assuming the question or comment is relevant to the topic).
- As appropriate, ask the person making a challenging comment to explain their point more fully. If a factual assertion is made, ask for the source of their information. Encourage everyone to draw connections between their comments and the policy issues at hand.
- If some of the participants object to moving from a large group format to small group discussions, you may suggest that those who wish to do so should move to the small group discussions. A facilitator or staff member can work with those remaining to construct a process that will meet their needs.
- Intervene if personal verbal attacks are made by one participant to another. Refer back to the ground rules and ask that such comments not be made or repeated. If a meeting leader or facilitator is individually verbally attacked, they should not respond in kind but should refer to the ground rules. Ask the speaker to reframe the question or comment in a way that focuses on the policy issues at hand.
- Suggest a short break and, as appropriate, speak to an individual about his or her inappropriate language or interactions with others.
- Be aware that people who do not feel heard are likely to speak loudest. Some individuals also use more direct or emotional styles of verbal and nonverbal expression than others.
- To the degree that's realistic, try to steer the conversation away from terms that may mean very different things to different people, such as "sustainability," "liberty," "property rights" or "economic justice."

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior

While rare, if one or more participants' behavior become continually and personally insulting or disruptive, it is important to acknowledge and address it appropriately. If this behavior is not addressed, the meeting may deteriorate and the chances of accomplishing the meeting's purpose will decrease. Clearly establish in advance which individuals are responsible for taking such action, and communicate this to meeting sponsors, leaders and facilitators.

If insults, disruptive behavior, or challenges to the meeting continue to occur, consider the following ideas:

- Review and enforce the meeting ground rules.
- Have the meeting facilitator maintain control of the microphone(s).
- In some cases, ask the group whether they wish the meeting to continue as planned or move to another format or process. However, this can be difficult and usually unwise in an already polarized or increasingly out-of-control meeting.
- If a "back-up" engagement process has been planned, move to it if appropriate and explain to participants what will happen next.
- If some participants continue to shout, talk over others, or disrupt the meeting:
 - Indicate that they will be asked to leave if the disorderly behavior continues; and take that step if called for; and/or
 - Conclude the meeting.

About the Institute for Local Government

This tipsheet is a service of the Institute for Local Government (ILG) whose mission is to provide good government at the local level with practical, impartial and easy-to-use resources for California communities. ILG is the nonprofit 501(c)(3) research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties and the California Special Districts Association.

For more information and to access the Institute's resources on public engagement, visit www.ca-ilg.org/engagement.

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✓ **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING COMES FIRST AND REMAINS AT THE CENTER**

The deeper goal of any public engagement activity is not the issue at hand (where to build a new road or whether police officers should wear body cameras). It is fostering trusting and collaborative relationships between community and government because these relationships lead to better government policy and better outcomes for communities. So, see each engagement activity as an opportunity to build relationships. Because in the long-run these relationships are more important than the issue at hand, do what needs to be done in the moment to respond to the needs of the participants rather than adhering to your plans or agenda.

Turn out is one of the most challenging aspects of public engagement – especially getting beyond the usual suspects. A relational approach is the best way to drive turn out. Invest in developing relationships with individuals and community institutions (schools, houses of worship, nonprofits) and use those relationships to turn out participants. Posting events online and in the media is less effective than having friends, clergy, teachers, and other community members invite each other.

✓ **KNOW YOUR PURPOSE AND DESIGN ACCORDINGLY**

Too often a unit of government doesn't consider the true purpose for the engagement activity – is it to inform the public about a decision already made; to get feedback on options; to work collaboratively toward a decision or something else? Know where your purpose falls on the [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation](#) from inform to empower. Know your specific goals for the activity. The purpose and goals for the meeting should determine every aspect of the agenda and all the plans. So first take the time to get clear about the purpose of the activity.

✓ **PLAN, PLAN, PLAN**

You simply can't over plan a good public engagement activity, whether it is preparing accessible background on the issue for attendees, identifying and inviting a broad array of attendees, creating a warm and welcoming environment, planning for displays of strong emotion (sometimes called disruptions), and so much more. The more you plan the better your outcomes will be – from participant satisfaction to quality of information gathered. Resources for better planning include [Dealing with Deeply Held Concerns and other Challenges to Public Engagement](#) and [Planning Public Engagement](#).

Consider creating a planning team made up of representatives of the audiences you hope to engage. These representatives will provide excellent insight into the most accessible venue for the event, what presentations or materials participants will need to participate in a meaningful way, what set-up will best engage participants and much more. Involving them in the planning will also likely make them highly motivated to turn out their networks for the event.

✓ **DESIGN TO PROMOTE PROBLEM SOLVING RATHER THAN POSITION DEMANDING**

When we give each person at a public meeting three minutes at the microphone, we have inadvertently asked them to state their demands. We have not asked them to consider multiple perspectives and competing needs and we have not given them time to do so. At the end of such a meeting, the

government host often ends up with a long list of everyone's demands, many of which are incompatible. The host also ends up with a frustrated and disappointed crowd. Instead there are number of meeting designs that foster problem solving instead of position demanding. These designs usually put people in small groups with a table facilitator and ask them not just what they want, but to share their concerns and ideas and most importantly to ask them to consider the concerns and ideas of the others in the small group as they put forth ideas for a path forward that could address many, if not all, of those concerns and ideas.

✓ FOLLOW UP

It is essential that participants know how you used their input. Often it is not easy to get this information to participants. So, utilize more than one method:

- Share updates on your website and newsletter
- Send emails to all participants
- Ask members of your planning team to share updates
- Use community partners to disseminate updates

✓ REMEMBER THE '4 C'S OF TRUST': COMPETENCE, CARING, CONSISTENCY, COMMUNICATION

Trust is critical to creating the dialogue needed to work together on tough issues. As an exercise the government host could identify at least one way they are demonstrating each 'C'. For example:

- **Competence** – by providing accessible background information on the topic or having governmental presenters who can share the information in plain language
- **Caring** – by providing food, childcare, and translation
- **Consistency** – by developing and maintaining relationships with participants
- **Communication** – by sharing meeting summaries and how the input was used

✓ SET HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Human beings tend to rise to high expectations and sink to low ones. High expectations include that participants will listen to learn rather than to plan a rebuttal, presume positive intent of everyone present, and be open to changing their minds. Consider creating a list of expectations ahead of time or do it with the group. Remember to share the expectations multiple times before and during the event – post them on the wall, review them at the beginning of the meeting and again later in the meeting, put them on table tents, etc.

✓ CREATE SPACE AND TIME TO ACKNOWLEDGE MISSTEPS, ANGER, FEAR, DIFFERENCE

Given that it is challenging to productively acknowledge missteps, anger, fear and difference, government tends to try to avoid doing so. However, in the long run avoiding these issues is *harder* as they will manifest as unwillingness to work together on a path forward and activism against decisions made by the unit of government. View anger as a passionate commitment to the issue and conflicting points of view as a resource for good decision making. For tips on working through particularly a divisive issue and with strong emotions see the [OCDR website](#) or the [Community Mediation Minnesota website](#) or consider using a [professional facilitator](#) with experience with high conflict situations.



Dealing with Emotional Audiences

www.ca-ilg.org/EmotionalAudiences

October 2009

Question: *We have a controversial development proposal coming up for decision and we are expecting a difficult public hearing. In particular, we are expecting many of those who are opposed to the development to be quite emotional about what they perceive as negative effects of the development. There are of course countervailing positive effects.*

As decision-makers, what can we do to keep the tone of the hearing civil and focused on the merits (and demerits) of the proposal?

Answer: There are a number of strategies that leaders can employ to maximize the likelihood that public meetings will involve constructive exchanges that contribute to the best decision being made. These strategies are most successful, however, as sustained, long-term efforts to meaningfully engaging a wide spectrum of the community in the decision-making process. As such, they involve acting on certain values as leaders and decision-makers. This relationship to values is the connection between ethics and leadership.

Resources Available through the Institute

The Institute's Meeting Resource Center aims to help local officials and agency staff make the most of meeting time.

www.ca-ilg.org/meeting-resource-center

Understanding the Sources of Public Emotion

You indicate that the people at the hearing are likely to be “emotional” about the proposal. In your own desired to be calm and civil in your own responses to what might occur at the hearing, it can be helpful to understand *why* people get emotional in situations like you describe.

In their book, *Dealing with an Angry Public*, Lawrence Susskind and Patrick Field note that people can get emotional—angry—in three situations:

1. When people have been hurt;
2. When people feel threatened by risks not of their making; and
3. When they believe their fundamental beliefs are being challenged.

They note that anger can be intensified when people feel:

- Weak or powerless in the face of others who have power;
- Treated unfairly, disrespectfully or dishonestly; or
- Anger is a helpful way of rallying the troops, demonstrating one's own power, or bullying others into accepting their point of view.

They note that while understanding discrete sources of anger can be helpful, most situations involve a combination of causes.¹

It sounds like the people concerned about the proposed development could be feeling threatened by the risks they perceive the development poses to them. Perhaps they are worried that the development will hurt their property values or other qualities of their neighborhood that they like. There may be public health and safety concerns.

Of course, as decision-makers, you have power to ultimately decide what happens with the proposal. Moreover, there may be the perception that the project proponent has political clout and extensive resources with which to pursue approval of a project. Members of the community they may be worried decision-makers don't care about their concerns and won't take their interests into account in making a decision.

Compounding their frustration and anxiety may be the fact that concerned residents may not understand the decision-making process or how to be effective advocates of their interests. They may feel showing their anger is the only way to underscore the depth of their concerns and get decision-makers' attention. They may also not have all the information that would be helpful to them in understanding both the downsides and the upsides of a particular project.²

Leading by Values

With power comes responsibilities that are linked to core values. As mentioned previously in this column, research by the Institute for Global Ethics indicates that humans all share common core values irrespective of religious faith, culture or nationality. These include the values of trustworthiness, fairness, responsibility, compassion, respect and loyalty.³

For example, a central *responsibility* for public officials is to make decisions that are in the community's interests. This is the essence of leadership in a representative democracy. It may not always be clear what course of action is in a community's best interests; reasonable people can earnestly disagree.

Moreover, with net benefits can also come costs. Another hallmark of values-based leadership is working to assure that certain neighborhoods don't bear *unfair* burdens associated with achieving those community-wide benefits. If those burdens are not avoidable, then a leader looks for ways that those burdens can be counterbalanced with corresponding benefits to those neighborhoods.

Another important responsibility for public decision-makers is stewardship of the decision-making process. This involves making sure that the process is *fair* and that all points of view are treated with *respect*. Another responsibility is making sure that participants in the process have *trustworthy* information about the impacts—both positive and negative—about a proposal. And of course, leaders themselves need to be trustworthy. This, among other things, means telling the truth, acknowledging mistakes and being guided by what serves the community's interests—not leaders' personal or political interests.

The Public Is Skeptical, If Not Downright Distrustful

The unfortunate reality is that polling data is replete with examples of the public thinking that government is generally controlled by a few big interests looking out for themselves⁴ and skepticism about whether one can trust government to do what's right. Fortunately, the public tends to have more faith in local government,⁵ but the general lack of trust in government means that it doesn't take much for residents to question whose interests are being served in a given situation. The media and bloggers frequently stand ready to encourage that kind of thinking.

Campaign finance and financial interest disclosure requirements enable the media and public to know whether the project proponent has engaged in efforts to curry favor with decision-makers. Disqualification requirements help protect the public's trust by requiring decision-makers to step aside from the decision-making process if they or those with whom they have a financial relationship could be financially affected by approval or rejection of the project. Open meeting and fair process laws also assure the public that decisions have not been made in advance of public meetings, with the concomitant expectation that public officials will hear and consider the public's views in making their decision on a matter.

These laws create minimum standards for protecting the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of the decision-making process; public officials can and do set their sights higher than these minimum requirements. From a public trust and confidence standpoint, it is necessary but not sufficient to faithfully comply with these transparency and disqualification requirements.

A Leadership Strategy

Assuming that there aren't conflict of interest or other issues that might cause the public to question the underlying motivation for decisions, the next question is how to build trust in the decision-making process in general. Susskind and Field recommend a strategy that focuses on building and maintaining a *long-term* relationship of trust between your agency and the community it serves.

This involves, among other things, being willing to 1) share information, 2) listen to people's concerns and 3) learn what steps might be taken to address those concerns.⁶

- ✓ **Sharing Information:** This means that the agency and the project proponent must share all information—the good, bad and the ugly. If indeed the project will or could have negative effects, whitewashing that fact will not help build trust in the long run since the agency is likely to be in for a big “we told you so” when those negative effects start occurring after the project is in place. Moreover, after the project is approved, the project proponent is not likely to have the same if any incentives to address those effects.

The agency also should share information about how the decision-making process will work, so concerned residents know how to participate effectively. This also underscores that the public agency is genuinely interested in their concerns.

- ✓ **Listening:** Acknowledging concerns is very important. It demonstrates that the agency and its leaders care about its residents and are willing to explore solutions to the problems that the project may create. Active listening means reiterating what has been heard to make sure 1) those sharing their concerns understand that their message is being heard, and 2) those receiving the information understand accurately the concerns that are being expressed. Then, as Susskind and Henry note, following up with questions to probe underlying assumptions and concerns is critical.⁷ The goal is to get to the root of the concerns (“We understand that you want us to turn this project down; what specific impacts are you concerned about and how will these impacts affect you and your neighbors?”).

This may mean decision-makers will have to work hard to listen past the expressions of anger and fear that might occur, especially if these expressions are less than civil.

- ✓ **Learning.** Once core concerns have been identified, the process of addressing those concerns can begin. Leaders can ask the project proponent and concerned residents what steps might minimize the impacts that are of concern. Leaders can share their own ideas and seek reactions or refinements.

A challenge is that traditional public hearing formats tend to be ill-suited to this kind of dialogue. This is why public agencies are well-advised to encourage project proponents to meet with concerned residents in advance of public hearings.

Skilled public agency staff can play an important role in making sure these meetings are bona fide exchanges of information as opposed to merely a one-way sales pitch. Encouraging staff to help the public frame their questions and get answers can help concerned residents feel that the public agency does indeed care about their concerns. Letting staff know that you appreciate their efforts to independently apply the agency’s standards and get answers for questions that decision-makers and the public are likely to have can also pay big dividends in making sure decision-makers themselves have full information on which to exercise their judgment.

Smart project proponents also understand that it’s in their long-term interest to share, listen and learn as well. This includes offering commitments to minimize knowable impacts and offer benefits that may counterbalance impacts that cannot be minimized or

avoided. For those impacts that are feared but may not occur, the project proponent may be able to offer commitments to address those impacts if indeed they do occur. Interestingly, Susskind and Field's book is just as much addressed to the private sector as it is to the public sector.

The Mutual Gains Approach to Resolving Disputes

In *Dealing with an Angry Public*, Susskind and Field advocate what they call the "mutual gains" approach to dealing with an angry public. This involves using processes that adhere to six key principles.

1. Acknowledge the concerns of the other side
2. Encourage joint fact finding
3. Offer contingent commitments to minimize impacts if they do occur; promise to compensate knowable but unintended impacts
4. Accept responsibility, admit mistakes and share power
5. Act in a trustworthy fashion at all times
6. Focus on building long-term relationships⁸

The authors explain each of these principles and illustrate them in their book (by examples of where these principles have worked and examples of where pursuing the opposite approach led to sometimes disastrous results).

Bottom Line: No Magic Wands

It may or may not be possible to address residents' concerns about the proposed project. There are limits to what a local agency can legally require a project proponent to do and it may be that the current standards of the community need to be updated to reflect the community's concerns about a given type or project. If so, that's something leaders need to be forthright about and the task becomes one of figuring out a better set of standards and processes for the future.

Ultimately, it will be the frequently difficult task of decision-makers to decide whether the project makes sense for the community under current circumstances. If decision-makers decide it does, there still may be people who disagree and are disappointed (and yes, angry) with that decision. If decision-makers decide the project does not make sense, then there are likely to be members of the community that are disappointed (and again, possibly angry) with that decision as well.

As leaders and decision-makers, your collective goal is to have as many people possible feel heard and that their input made a difference. Another goal is for the project proponent and opponents alike to feel that the process was fair and their leaders behaved in a trustworthy manner.

As writer Lewis Lapham noted, “Leadership consists not in degrees of technique but in traits of character; it requires moral rather than athletic or intellectual effort, and it imposes on both leader and follower alike the burdens of self-restraint.”

You can’t control others’ behavior, but you can determine the traits of character you bring to your own role in the decision-making process. You can also encourage your agency to apply values and character traits to the decision-making process. Although it requires work, the potential payoff is a long-term relationship of trust and confidence with the community that will likely pay big dividends in terms of the agency’s efforts to address the difficult issues of the time.

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For more information and to access the Institute’s resources on ethics visit www.ca-ilg.org/ethics-transparency. If you would like to access this resource directly, go to www.ca-ilg.org/document/dealing-emotional-audiences.

The Institute welcomes feedback on this resource:

- *Email:* ethicsmailbox@ca-ilg.org Subject: *Dealing with Emotional Audiences*
- *Mail:* 1400 K Street, Suite 205 ▪ Sacramento, CA ▪ 95814

References and Resources

Note: Sections in the California Code are accessible at <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/>. Fair Political Practices Commission regulations are accessible at www.fppc.ca.gov/index.php?id=52. A source for case law information is www.findlaw.com/cacases/ (requires registration). (kj)

¹ Lawrence Susskind and Patrick Field, *Dealing with an Angry Public: The Mutual Gains Approach to Resolving Disputes*, (The Free Press: 1996) at 16-17.

² *Id.* at 28.

³ Rushworth Kidder, *How Good People Make Tough Choices: Resolving the Dilemmas of Ethical Living* (Fireside: 1995) at 13-49.

⁴ See August 2008 Public Policy Institute of California (finding 67% percent of respondents believe that the state is run by a few big interests as opposed to 24 percent believing that government is run for the benefit of all the people), available at http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_808MBS.pdf (see question 23). See also **Council for Excellence in Government poll** conducted in mid 1999 (giving special interests top billing in answer to what’s wrong with government today), available at www.pollingreport.com/institut.htm.

⁵ In a September 2008 Gallup poll, 72 percent of respondents said that they have either a great deal or fair amount of trust in local government. See www.gallup.com/video/110461/Americans-Trust-Local-Govt-Much-More-Than-National.aspx.

⁶ *Angry Public*, at 229-231.

⁷ *Id.* at 231.

⁸ *Id.* at 37-38.