

WORKSHOP ENHANCES CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC PROCESS ACROSS WYOMING

Situation

Public participation is increasing in both importance and complexity in Wyoming and across the nation, fueled by citizens' desire to engage in decisions that affect them and public officials' desire to engage the public in useful, civil ways

Those who facilitate and manage public involvement need the knowledge and skills to create a respectful, positive, and useful engagement opportunity and create the best possible outcomes for all. University of Wyoming Extension addresses this need by training practitioners who can serve as conveners for effective public participation and others to do the same within their agencies and communities.

The "Essentials of Public Participation" course was offered three times in Wyoming over 15 months. While open to any interested party, the training was marketed to those who work in state and federal agencies who frequently gather public input, such as the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Wyoming departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Environmental Quality, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and the Wyoming Business Council.



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Fifty-five individuals completed the 12-hour training in Casper, Cody, and Cheyenne.

Impact

In evaluations by participants immediately after the training, participants agreed or strongly agreed the climate was respectful, they were challenged to think critically, and they were motivated to learn more about facilitation techniques to gather public input. Almost all the 48 participants who responded to the e-mailed survey indicated they are or will be more effective in a facilitation role.

A six-month follow-up evaluation was also emailed to the 55 participants who completed the “Essentials of Public Participation” workshop. This survey asked participants to indicate if the training improved skills necessary to effectively facilitate

public meetings. Of the 36 respondents, all indicated their conflict management skills had improved as a result of the training, and 80 percent indicated their communication skills had improved. In addition, 60 percent shared they had also improved their decision making, problem solving, and leadership skills.

Brief follow-up phone interviews were conducted with 10 participants to gather stories about how the training made a difference in their work. They were selected because they represented workshop participants' demographic, geographic, organizational or agency affiliation, and professional role. Of the 10 individuals contacted, six interviews were completed. Samples of responses are:

“Our agency has been putting much more thought into engaging the public. We constantly remind ourselves that just informing the public isn't really engaging them.”

“We're not just sharing more information with the public, we're sharing better information.”

“We are doing better at defining the ‘real’ problem we are addressing – not just what we think the problem is.”

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**Participation
Course**
[http://bit.ly/
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