

Skill Sheets for Participation Professionals: SEVEN MISDEDS LEADING TO ANTI-PARTICIPATION

1. Ambivalence — A Lack of Commitment

All levels of the organization must be committed to gaining and using public input at the appropriate level. Commitment by public engagement staff without the commensurate commitment of managers, technical staff, and decision makers often results in a public that is over-promised as to their potential influence.

2. Complacency — The Checklist Approach

Approaches that dictate specific meetings and activities often bypass the important steps of defining the purpose and promise of public engagement and can prevent agencies from appreciating the potential value of public engagement.

3. Procrastination — Public Participation Starts Too Late

When the public is not provided the opportunity for input until a proposed decision is developed, it is generally understood that little opportunity for meaningful public impact exists and public events simply become gripe sessions at best. Public input into decision criteria and alternatives are the most effective places to ensure public influence and satisfaction with decisions.

6. Ambiguity — The Public Is Not Adequately Informed

Without a great deal of attention and effort toward comprehensive and transparent public information, the public does not have the necessary understanding to provide meaningful input to the decision.

4. Detachment — Participation Is Not Integrated Into Decision-Making

When public participation is conducted parallel to, rather than as part of, decision making, the public does not receive the information it needs in time to provide meaningful input. Public input is largely reflected as complaints and hardened positions, and decision makers rarely receive public input in time to truly influence decision making.

5. Omission — Not All Stakeholder Voices are Heard

Without the full engagement of a broad cross-section of the community, the public engagement process may recognize only some of the stakeholder values and interests that are important to making decisions, and often hear from only the loudest and most extreme viewpoints.

7. Disregard — The Public Receives Inadequate Feedback

Without timely and specific feedback about how its input was used, the public does not understand how its concerns were taken into consideration and how its input influenced.