Community issue groups

Community issue groups have similarities to Focus groups and Citizens' juries. Their main aim is to bring new views and external perspectives to the planning process. Community issues groups usually consist of between 8 and 12 participants who meet up to five times over a series of weeks. These meetings enable a more in-depth analysis and exploration of the subject area compared to Focus groups. Meetings build upon previous discussions, giving participants time between gatherings to reconsider issues and raise questions. New information can be introduced to the discussion to build up participants' knowledge of the issue. Discussions are normally taped and analysed later, and reports are produced.

Community disabled access group discuss woodland plans from their perspective New Forest Forest District.

Resources and requirements

Skills
- Good communication and presentational skills are basic requirements.

Equipment
- Good meeting facilities are necessary.
- Taping, transcribing and report writing equipment are usually required.

Time
- Each meeting takes 2 to 2.5 hours.

Useful sources of information

Books
- Participatory environmental processes: experiences from north and south. T. Holmes and I. Scoones (2000). IDS Working Paper. Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★★

INVOLVING: ★★★

PARTNERSHIP:

Strengths

- Community issue groups work more efficiently than Focus groups in encouraging careful consideration.
- Informed discussions offer an opportunity to explore issues in-depth.
- Opportunities are created to refine views.
- The technique is fairly cost effective.

Weaknesses

- Time requirements are quite high.
- Relatively low numbers of participants are involved in the groups.

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at:
www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox