



Task force

A Task force comprises a group of experts or relevant stakeholders appropriately appointed to deal with a particular issue or issues. A Task force is usually formed when a specific outcome or policy recommendation needs to be developed. It may review the participation process, receive community input, and exercise other functions depending on its mandate. A group is assigned a specific task, with a time limit for reaching a conclusion and resolving a problem, subject to ratification by official decision-makers. The personnel of the agency usually appoint Task force members and a facilitator guides discussion to cover all issues that the participants see important. It may use other group work methods such as brainstorming in order to seek solutions to specific problems. The sponsoring agency can provide technical support depending on the issues addressed. The members of the Task force should have credibility with the public and represent various views. It is also important that the members are independent. Academic organisations may sometimes take part in organising a Task force with a local agency.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- The facilitator must have experience in group processes.
- The facilitator must also have excellent communication and presentation skills.

Equipment

- A large meeting facility is usually required.
- Materials and facilities are needed to produce presentations of proposals and reports.

Time

- Regular meetings may be required to understand and deliberate the issues.
- Each meeting may last several hours or even a full day.
- Planning should be started several months in advance.

Useful sources of information

Books

- Community planning handbook. N. Wates ed. (2000). Earthscan Publications. London.

Web

- The International Association for Public Participation: www.iap2.org

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★

INVOLVING: ★★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★

Strengths

- Findings are likely to have fairly high credibility if the diverse interests of stakeholder groups are presented.
- A Task force offers an opportunity to reach compromise.
- The group is usually able to produce high quality proposals and recommendations.
- In a collaborative Task force, a great depth of discussion is expected.

Weaknesses

- Costs may be quite high.
- A skilled facilitator is needed.
- The process is time and labour intensive.
- Reaching a consensus is not guaranteed.
- Participants must make an extensive commitment to the process.
- The results may be too general to draw any firm conclusions.

- Public involvement techniques for transportation decision-making by United States Department of Transportation: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/colltf.htm

Training

- The Prince's Foundation: tel. 020 7613 8500 or www.princes-foundation.org

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