core principles
for public engagement

the seven core principles
working group

The following individuals made up the core Public Engagement Principles (PEP) working group:

▸ **Tom Atlee**, Director of the Co-Intelligence Institute

▸ **Stephen Buckley**, CEO of U.S. Transparency

▸ **John Godec**, Board member of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

▸ **Reynolds-Anthony Harris**, Managing Director of Lyceum Partners & Co.

▸ **Sandy Heierbacher**, Director of the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD)

▸ **Leanne Nurse**, Board Member of the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD)

▸ **Steve Pyser**, Editor of the International Journal of Public Participation

▸ **Stephanie Roy McCallum**, Past President, International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)

the seven core principles
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the seven core principles
introduction

In a strong democracy, citizens and government work *together* to build a society that protects individual freedom while simultaneously ensuring liberty and justice for all. Engaging people around the issues that affect their lives and their country is a key component of a strong democratic society.

Public engagement involves convening diverse, representative groups of people to wrestle with information from a variety of viewpoints all to the end of making better, often more creative decisions. Public engagement aims to provide people with direction for their own community activities, or with public judgments that will be seriously considered by policy-makers and other power-holders.

The more any given public engagement effort takes into consideration the following seven Core Principles, the more it can expect to effectively build mutual understanding, meaningfully affect policy development, and/or inspire collaborative action among citizens and institutions. These seven interdependent principles serve both as ideals to pursue and as criteria for judging quality. Rather than promoting partisan agendas, the application of the Core Principles creates the conditions for authentic engagement around public issues.

A note about technology:

The Core Principles for Public Engagement apply to both online and in-person efforts to engage the public, and the use of technology should be encouraged whenever appropriate to enhance and not impede these seven principles. However, there is not yet consensus in our field on standards for the use of technology that would warrant the inclusion of specific online or electronic guidelines in this document.

the seven core principles
principles

These seven principles reflect the *common* beliefs and understandings of those working in the fields of public engagement, conflict resolution, and collaboration. In practice, people apply these and additional principles in many different ways.

1. **CAREFUL PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

   Through adequate and inclusive planning, ensure that the design, organization, and convening of the process serve both a clearly defined purpose and the needs of the participants.

2. **INCLUSION AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY**

   Equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.

3. **COLLABORATION AND SHARED PURPOSE**

   Support and encourage participants, government and community institutions, and others to work together to advance the common good.

4. **OPENNESS AND LEARNING**

   Help all involved listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options, and rigorously evaluate public engagement activities for effectiveness.

5. **TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST**

   Be clear and open about the process, and provide a public record of the organizers, sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed.

6. **IMPACT AND ACTION**

   Ensure each participatory effort has real potential to make a difference, and that participants are aware of that potential.

7. **SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURE**

   Promote a culture of participation with programs and institutions that support ongoing quality public engagement.

the seven core principles
endorsements

ORGANIZATIONAL ENDORSEMENTS

Below is a full list of the organizations and networks which have signed on to endorse the Core Principles for Public Engagement as of June 10, 2009. Representatives of many of these organizations played significant roles in crafting the Core Principles. A regularly updated list of endorsers is posted at *www.ncdd.org/pep/*, and we will continue to update the online list as endorsements roll in. Email NCDD Director Sandy Heierbacher at sandy@thataway.org to join the list of endorsers.

- The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), *www.iap2.org*

- The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD), *www.ncdd.org*

- U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, *www.ecr.gov*

- Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), *www.ica-usa.org*

- International Association of Facilitators (IAF), *www.iaf-world.org*

- National League of Cities, *www.nlc.org*

- Association for Conflict Resolution's Environment and Public Policy (EPP) Section, *www.mediate.com/acrepp/*

- ToP (Technology of Participation) Trainers Network, *www.ica-usa.org/index.php?pr=top-network*

- Co-Intelligence Institute, *www.co-intelligence.org*

- League of Women Voters, *www.lwv.org*

- Public Agenda, *www.publicagenda.org*

- Public Conversations Project, *www.publicconversations.org*

- National School Public Relations Association, *www.nspra.org*

- AmericaSpeaks, *www.americaspeaks.org*

- National Issues Forums Institute, *www.nifi.org*

- Everyday Democracy, *www.everyday-democracy.org*

- Canadian Community for Dialogue & Deliberation (C2D2), *www.c2d2.ca*

- Centre for Dialogue, Simon Fraser University, *www.sfu.ca/dialogue/study+practice/index.html*

- Society for Community Research and Action, Division 27 of the American Psychological Association, *www.scra27.org*

- Community Initiatives Network, *www.communityinitiatives.org*

- IFOK GmbH (Berlin-based consulting firm), *www.ifok.eu*

- Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center, *www.pcrcweb.org*

- Forum Foundation, www.forumfoundation.org

- The Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University, *http://cdd.stanford.edu/*

- The Democracy Imperative, *www.unh.edu/democracy*

- Public Dialogue Consortium, *www.publicdialogue.org*

- European Institute for Public Participation, *www.participationinstitute.org*

- Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy, Kansas State University, *www.k-state.edu/icdd*

- UHD (University of Houston - Downtown) Center for Public Deliberation, *www.uhd.edu/cpd*

- U.S. Transparency, *www.UStransparency.com*

- Network for Peace through Dialogue, *www.networkforpeace.com*

- Common Sense California, *www.commonsenseca.org*

- The Jefferson Center, *www.jefferson-center.org*

- Global Facilitator Service Corps, *www.globalfacilitators.org*

- Deliberative Democracy Consortium, *www.deliberative-democracy.net*

- Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, *www.iaaw.ca*

- Future Search Network, *www.futuresearch.net*

- Institute for Conflict Analysis and Intervention at James Madison University Communication Studies, *www.jmu.edu/commstudies/conflictstudies.shtml*

- The Policy Consensus Initiative, *www.policyconsensus.org*

- The Communications Center, Inc., *www.buildingdialogue.com*

- Common Knowledge, *www.ckgroup.org*

- The Transforming Communication Project, *www.tcpcommunity.org*

- Intellitics, Inc., *www.intellitics.com*

- DeepDebate, *www.DeepDebate.org*

- Omega Point International, Inc., *www.omegapoint.net*

- The Broadwell Hill Learning Center and Resiliency Initiative, *www.broadwellhill.org*

- Institute for Cultural and Environmental Understanding, *www.ICEU-site.com*

- Pearce Associates, *www.pearceassociates.com*

- Center for Voter Deliberation of Northern Virginia, *www.VoterDeliberation.org*

- Facilitators Network Singapore, *www.fns.sg*

- Institute for 21st Century Agoras, *www.globalagoras.org*

- Center for Wise Democracy, *www.wisedemocracy.org*

- Jewish-Palestinian Living Room Dialogue, *http://traubman.igc.org/dg-prog.htm*
- Meta-Culture Dialogics (India), *www.meta-culture.org*
- Bay Area Nonviolent Communication, *www.baynvc.org*
- Ag Innovations Network, *www.aginnovations.org*
- Masterful Facilitation Institute, *www.masterfulfacilitation.ca*
- The FUSION Foundation, *www.thefusionfoundation.org*
- Breakthroughs Unlimited Inc., *www.breakthroughsunlimited.com*
- HIGHER EDge, *www.higheredge.org*
- Omega Point International, Inc., *www.omegapoint.net*
- Global Citizen Journey, *www.globalcitizenjourney.org*
- Workplace Connections, *www.workplaceconnections.com*
- Peaceful World Conversations, *www.PeacefulWorldConversations.org*
- ARINA, Inc., *www.global-arina.org*
- FCRC Consensus Solutions, *http://consensus.fsu.edu*
- Dialogue Programs, Continuing Studies, Simon Fraser University, *www.sfu.ca/dialogue*
- Association Building Community, *www.abcglobal.net*
- Planetwork, *www.planetwork.net*
- Iowa Partners in Learning, *www.extension.iastate.edu/publicdeliberation/index.html*
- PlaceMatters, *www.placematters.org*
- The Axelrod Group (collaborative change consultants), *www.axelrodgroup.com*
- Meister Consultants Group, Inc., *www.mc-group.com*
- International Sociometry Training Network, *www.sociometry.net*
- Public Sphere Project, *www.publicsphereproject.org*
- The Community Mediation Center (Harrisonburg, VA), *www.weworkitout.org*
- The Richmond Dialogue Group of Virginia

INDIVIDUAL ENDORSEMENTS

Below are the individuals who have signed on to endorse the Core Principles for Public Engagement as of June 10, 2009. A regularly updated list of both organizational and individual endorsers is posted at www.ncdd.org/pep/, and we will continue to update the online list as additional endorsements roll in. Email NCDD Director Sandy Heierbacher at sandy@thataway.org to join the list of endorsers.

‣ Jeffrey Abelson, Filmmaker, *Song of a Citizen*

‣ Ronny Barkay, Professional Group Facilitator

‣ Erik Bergrud, Director, *International Center for Civic Engagement* and Special Assistant to the President for University Projects on Civic Engagement, *Park University*

‣ Laura W. Black, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, *School of Communication Studies at Ohio University*

‣ Joop Boukes, *joopboukes.nl* (dialogue organization in The Netherlands)

‣ Beatrice Briggs, Director, *International Institute for Facilitation and Change*

‣ Juanita Brown, Co-Founder, *The World Café*

‣ Millicent Carvalho, Ph.D., Executive Director, *Pennsylvania Conflict Resolution and Mediation Services, Inc.*

‣ Aleco Christakis, President, *CWA Ltd*

‣ LaVonna Connelly, Large System Social Worker

‣ John Dedrick, Vice President & Program Director, *Charles F. Kettering Foundation*

‣ Mayor Kai Degner, *City of Harrisonburg*

‣ James M. Dubinsky, PhD, Associate Professor and Director, *Center for Student Engagement and Community Partnerships at Virginia Tech*

‣ Anita C. Fonte, PhD., Principal Consultant, *Community Renaissance*

‣ Archon Fung, Ford Foundation Professor of Democracy and Citizenship, *JFK School of Government at Harvard University*

‣ Colin G. Gallagher, RPCV, Executive Master of Public Administration (*ASPA, NCDD*)

‣ Nancy J. H. Gansneder, Ed.D, Director, *Academy for Civic Renewal at the University of Virginia*

‣ Cynthia Gibson, Ph.D., Owner, *Cynthesis Consulting*

‣ Kaliya Hamlin, Unconference Designer & Facilitator, *unconference.net*

‣ Leilani Rashida Henry, CEO, *Being & Living Enterprises, LTD.*

‣ Jerry D. Hill, Director, *All American Network*

‣ Becky Hirst, Owner, *Becky Hirst Consulting*

‣ Sandra S. Hodge, Ph.D., Director, *Community Deliberation Program, University of Missouri Extension*

‣ Emily Jenke, Community Engagement & Facilitation Specialist

‣ Dr. Roz Leppington, Assistant Professor, *James Madison University School of Communication Studies*

‣ Susan Levin, Founder, *Dialogue for Solutions*

- Peter Levine, Director, *CIRCLE at Tufts University*

- Annie Loyd, Professional Facilitator and Speaker

- Nancy Margulies, World Cafe Host, Facilitator and Graphic Recorder

- Noëlle McAfee, Associate Research Professor of Philosophy and Conflict Analysis, *Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University*

- MaryElizabeth Merritt, Ph.D., Founding Director, *Four Winds, Inc.*

- Phil Neisser, Professor, *SUNY Potsdam Department of Politics*

- Susan Partnow, Owner, *Partnow Communications*

- David B. Patton, Associate Professor Emeritus, *Ohio State University Extension*

- William Potapchuk, President, *Community Building Institute*

- Judith Richardson, President, *PONO Consultants International, Inc.*

- Brad Rourke, Independent Consultant

- Christine Whitney Sanchez, Founder, *Collaborative Wisdom & Strategy*

- Rosalind Spigel, MSOD, Organization Development Consultant, *Change At Work*

- Sami Sunchild, Ph.D., Owner, *Red Victorian Peace Center*

- Carol Warkoczewski, Owner, *Synergy Builders*

the seven core principles
descriptions

Although we are not seeking endorsements for these expanded descriptions, this text was developed in a highly collaborative and transparent manner alongside the basic seven principles. The purpose of the expanded text is to illustrate and breathe life into the principles, and should accompany the list of Core Principles whenever possible. This expanded text can be tweaked or revised for different audiences -- and we welcome you to do so.

Principle #1
CAREFUL PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Through adequate and inclusive planning, ensure that the design, organization, and convening of the process serve both a clearly defined purpose and the needs of the participants.

In high quality engagement:
Participation begins when stakeholders, conveners and process experts engage together, with adequate support, in the planning and organizing process. Together they get clear on their unique context, purpose and task, which then inform their process design as well as their venue selection, set-up and choice of participants. They create hospitable, accessible, functional environments and schedules that serve the participants' logistical, intellectual, biological, aesthetic, identity, and cultural needs. In general, they promote conditions that support all the qualities on this list.

What to avoid:
Poorly designed programs that do not fit the specific needs and opportunities of the situation, or that are run by untrained, inexperienced, or ideologically biased organizers and programs. Such programs fail to achieve the desired objectives and disrespect or exclude relevant stakeholder groups. Public meetings are held in inaccessible, confusing venues, with inflexible schedules that do not provide adequate time for doing what needs to be done. Logistical, class, racial, and cultural barriers to participation are left unaddressed, effectively sidelining marginalized people and further privileging elites, majorities, "experts," and partisan advocates.

INCLUSION AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

Equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.

In high quality engagement:
Conveners and participants reflect the range of stakeholder or demographic diversity within the community or on the issue at hand. Where representatives are used, the nature, source, and any constraints on their representative authority are clearly identified and shared with participants. Alternatively, participants are randomly selected to represent a microcosm of the public. Participants have the opportunity to grapple with data and ideas that fairly represent different perspectives on the issue. Participants have equal status in discussions, and feel they are respected and their views are welcomed, heard, and responded to. Special effort is made to enable normally marginalized, silent, or dissenting voices to meaningfully engage — and fundamental differences are clarified and honored. Where necessary, anonymity is provided to enable important contributions.

What to avoid:
Participants are mostly "the usual suspects" — perhaps with merely token diversity added. Biased information is presented, and expert testimony seems designed to move people in a specific direction. People do not feel that it is safe to speak up, or they have little chance to do so — and if they do, there is little sign that they are actually heard. Participants, stakeholders, or segments of the public feel their interests, concerns and ideas are suppressed, ignored, or marginalized. Anonymity is used to protect abuses of power, not vulnerable critics.

<p style="text-align:center">Principle #3</p>

COLLABORATION AND SHARED PURPOSE

Support and encourage participants, government and community institutions, and others to work together to advance the common good.

In high quality engagement:

Organizers involve public officials, "ordinary" people, community leaders, and other interested and/or affected parties as equal participants in ongoing discussions where differences are explored rather than ignored, and a shared sense of a desired future can emerge. Organizers pay attention to the quality of communication, designing a process that enables trust to be built among participants through dialogue, permits deliberation of options, and provides adequate time for solutions to emerge and evolve. People with different backgrounds and ideologies work together on every aspect of the program — from planning and recruiting, to gathering and presenting information, all the way through to sharing outcomes and implementing agreed-upon action steps. In government-sponsored programs, there is good coordination among various agencies doing work relevant to the issue at hand.

What to avoid:

Unresponsive power-holders deliver one-way pronouncements or preside over hostile, disrespectful or stilted conversations. Patronizing experts and authorities feel they already have all the answers and "listen" only to appease. Engagement has no chance of impacting policy because relevant decisions have already been made or are already in the pipeline, or because those in power are not involved or committed. Loud or mainstream voices drown out all others, while personal stories, emotions, and unpopular opinions are not welcomed. References to isolated data or studies are used to suppress other forms of input. Involvement feels pointless to participants, lacking clear purpose or a link to action.

<center>Principle #4</center>

OPENNESS AND LEARNING

Help all involved listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options, and rigorously evaluate public engagement activities for effectiveness.

In high quality engagement:
Skilled, impartial facilitators and simple guidelines encourage everyone involved to share their views, listen, and be curious in order to learn things about themselves, each other, and the issues before them. Shared intention and powerful questions guide participants' exploration of adequate, fair, and useful information — and of their own disagreements — in an open and respectful atmosphere. This exploratory atmosphere enables them to delve more deeply into complexities and nuances and thereby generate new understandings, possibilities, and/or decisions that were not clear when their conversation began. There is an appropriate balance between consulting (a) facts and expertise and (b) participants' experience, values, vision, intuition, and concerns. Participants and leaders take away new skills and approaches to resolving conflicts, solving problems, and making decisions. Careful review, evaluation, and a spirit of exploration and innovation improve subsequent engagement work and develop institutional and community capacity.

What to avoid:
"Window dressing" public exercises go through the motions required by law or the dictates of PR before announcing a pre-determined outcome. Participants get on soapboxes or are repressed; fight or conform; get overridden or overwhelmed; and are definitely not listening to each other. Facilitation is weak or too directive, interfering with people's ability to communicate with each other openly, adjust their stances, and make progress. Assertive, mainstream, and official voices dominate. Available information is biased, scanty, overwhelming, or inaccessible — and experts lecture rather than discuss and clarify. Lack of time or inflexible process make it impossible to deal with the true complexity of the issue. Organizers and facilitators are too busy, biased, or insecure to properly review and evaluate what they've done.

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Principle #5

TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST

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Be clear and open about the process, and provide a public record of the organizers, sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed.

In high quality engagement:

Relevant information, activities, decisions, and issues that arise are shared with participants and the public in a timely way, respecting individuals' privacy where necessary. Process consultants and facilitators are helpful and realistic in describing their place in the field of public engagement and what to expect from their work. People experience planners, facilitators, and participants with official roles as straightforward, concerned, and answerable. Members of the public can easily access information, get involved, stay engaged, and contribute to the ongoing evolution of outcomes or actions the process generates.

What to avoid:

It is hard, if not impossible, to find out who is involved, what happened, and why. Research, advocacy, and answerability efforts are stymied. Participants, the public, and various stakeholders suspect hidden agendas and dubious ethics. Participants not only don't trust the facilitators but are not open about their own thoughts and feelings.

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Principle #6

IMPACT AND ACTION

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Ensure each participatory effort has the potential to make a difference, and that participants are aware of that potential.

In high quality engagement:

People believe — and can see evidence — that their engagement was meaningful, influencing government decisions, empowering them to act effectively individually and/or together, or otherwise impacting the world around them. Communications (of media, government, business and/or nonprofits involved) ensure the appropriate publics know the engagement is happening and talk about it with each other. Convening organizations or agencies maximize the quality and use of the input provided, and report back to participants and the public about how data from the program influenced their decisions or actions. The effort is productively linked to other efforts on the issue(s) addressed. Because diverse stakeholders understand, are moved by, and act on the findings and recommendations of the program, problems get solved, visions are pursued, and communities become more vibrant, healthy, and successful — despite ongoing differences.

What to avoid:

Participants have no confidence that they have had any meaningful influence — before, during, or after the public engagement process. There is no follow-through from anyone, and hardly anyone knows it happened, including other people and groups working on the issue being addressed. Participants' findings and recommendations are inarticulate, ill-timed, or useless to policy-makers — or seem to represent the views of only a small unqualified group — and are largely ignored or, when used, are used to suppress dissent. Any energy or activity catalyzed by the event quickly wanes.

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Principle #7

SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

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Promote a culture of participation with programs and institutions that support ongoing quality public engagement.

In high quality engagement:

Each new engagement effort is linked intentionally to existing efforts and institutions — government, schools, civic and social organizations, etc. — so quality engagement and democratic participation increasingly become standard practice. Participants and others involved in the process not only develop a sense of ownership and buy-in, but gain knowledge and skills in democratic methods of involving people, making decisions and solving problems. Relationships are built over time and ongoing spaces are created in communities and online, where people from all backgrounds can bring their ideas and concerns about public affairs to the table and engage in lively discussions that have the potential to impact their shared world.

What to avoid:

Public engagements, when they occur, are one-off events isolated from the ongoing political life of society. For most people, democracy means only freedoms and voting and perhaps writing a letter to their newspaper or representative. For activists and public officials, democracy is the business-as-usual battle and behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Few people — including public officials — have any expectation that authentic, empowered public participation is possible, necessary, forthcoming, or even desirable. Privileged people dominate, intentionally or unintentionally undermining the ability of marginalized populations to meaningfully participate.

the seven core principles
about the project

The Public Engagement Principles (PEP) Project was launched in mid-February 2009 as the result of several unrelated discussions about how the broad dialogue, deliberation, and public engagement fields of practice could or should support Barack Obama's January 21st memorandum on transparency and open government. The memo stated that the Obama administration would work to "ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration" to create an "unprecedented level of openness in Government." The memo calls for the creation of an Open Government Directive that will instruct executive departments and agencies to take specific actions in the areas of transparency, participation, and collaboration.

Our field was abuzz in meetings, on email discussion lists, and on phone calls considering how we could support this effort, and people seemed to agree on one thing in particular: our field of practice, as a whole, needs to agree on and articulate what we consider to be quality public engagement. And this clarity, whether or not it impacts the Open Government Directive, would be of great benefit to our field.

A small working group (listed on page two) formed to consider how to move forward quickly in as collaborative and transparent a way as possible, and the group decided to encourage broad involvement among our networks in the formation of a set of principles for public engagement we can all get behind. A simple forum (bulletin board) was created on the website of the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) to enable people to post and comment on existing sets of public engagement principles, values, and guidelines issued by various organizations and governing institutions, and to start developing a unified set of principles based on the work that had already been done. NCDD's Director, Sandy Heierbacher, initially posted about a dozen sets of principles, and another dozen were soon added by others.

Members of NCDD, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), and other networks were informed about the project, and dozens of people with different levels and types of experience in public engagement dove into the process.

Tom Atlee of the Co-Intelligence Institute created a draft document integrating all the statements and comments that were posted to the forum, which was subsequently critiqued by dozens of professionals and revised numerous times under the guidance of the core working group. A near-final version was distributed to leading organizations, both for feedback and to get the ball rolling for endorsements. At the same time, the text was posted to an open document review website to allow people to critique statement by statement. The final version on these pages emerged from that process, and was approved by the core group. It is currently being distributed through various public engagement, conflict resolution, and collaboration networks, inviting all interested organizations and individuals to endorse the Core Principles.

Please feel free to contact ncdd@thataway.org if you wish to endorse, or if you have questions about this document or suggestions for future revisions.