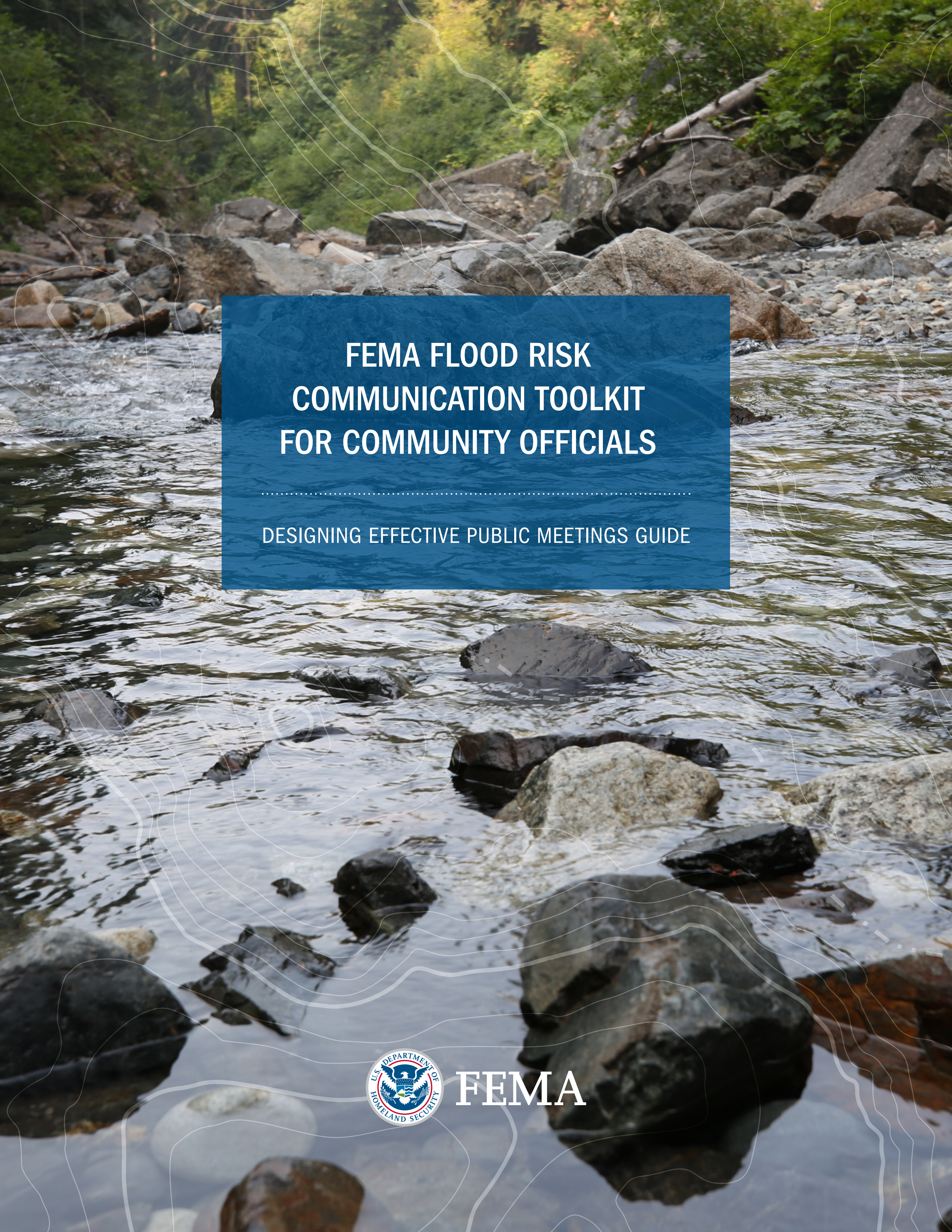

FEMA FLOOD RISK COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT FOR COMMUNITY OFFICIALS

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE PUBLIC MEETINGS GUIDE

FEMA

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FLOOD RISK COMMUNICATION TOOLKIT

As a community official, your role includes communicating with a variety of audiences about their natural hazard risk and steps that can be taken to minimize these risks or their impact. One important tool for this communication is public meetings.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Risk Mapping, Assessment, and Planning (Risk MAP) program provides flood maps and informational tools for communities to better assess their flood risks. The Designing Effective Public Meetings Guide is one piece of the Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials. This Toolkit can help community officials talk about flood risk with the public during the flood mapping process. The Toolkit also includes ideas and best practices for raising and sustaining awareness of flood risk and other natural hazards outside of a map update.

To see the full Flood Risk Communication Toolkit for Community Officials, visit:

FEMA.gov

Purpose of Public Meetings: Overview

There are several meetings that FEMA holds with community officials during a flood study and map update. Many of these meetings may be too technical for the public, and in your role as a community official, discussing flood hazards and risks with the public is essential. According to FEMA's annual flood risk awareness surveys, the public expects to learn about their community's flood risks from their local elected officials through local media, mailings, **meetings**, and phone calls. Meetings are an important opportunity for you to engage with residents and stakeholders and share your in-depth knowledge and data regarding your community's flooding history, development plans, flood mapping needs, and flood risk concerns.

The purpose of the flood hazard and risk meetings can vary. You may choose to have a meeting to gather input on existing conditions and data, to provide information to stakeholders and the general public to plan and execute personal actions to reduce risk, or to share information about available funding and resources to assist in local risk reduction activities via capital improvement projects.

PUBLIC MEETING SUGGESTIONS

Promote any public events like flood map meetings and open houses

Take your messages out of the Council Chambers and board rooms to the people

Use translations services for community members who may not use English as their first language

Cross-promote across social media platforms

Partner with other agencies to broaden your audience

Incentivize meeting participation with food and childcare or activities for children

Be willing to attend festivals or events to take your message to the people

Use multi-media and communication tools that fit your community

Why Have a Public Meeting?

Dialogue and information sharing between local officials and the public creates the understanding and trust needed for all parties to work toward a common goal. **Benefits of well-designed public and community meetings include the following:**

- Direct communication with members of the community to address specific concerns, e.g.: an opportunity for you and members of your community to share your stories and local experiences
- Engagement with your diverse population, adding a full range of perspectives and interests and including public perspective into proposed solutions
- Development of a wide base of support, building and maintaining relationships and partners that encourage buy-in for community issues
- Greater understanding of technically difficult or politically unpopular issues, i.e. engineering and mapping-related information for flood map updates

DESIGNING YOUR MEETING

In designing your public meeting, consider these factors: the objectives of the meeting, the kind of input you are seeking, and who needs to attend the meeting. These three factors will be critical to shaping your meeting design and will determine the format, content, and promotion of the meeting.

Meeting Objectives

An effective flood map or flood risk-related meeting will: a) have a set objective, and b) achieve that outcome. **Common meeting objectives include the following:**

OBJECTIVE 1

Share Data

Is the intent to share flood risk data with fellow community officials? Or the public?

OBJECTIVE 2

Communicate Progress

One of the meeting's main purposes may be to provide status updates to stakeholders.

OBJECTIVE 3

Make Decisions

Community members and stakeholders might attend and help inform decisions to improve the community's ability to recover after a flood event. Also, the public needs to understand and be equipped to make decisions on individual mitigation actions, including the choice to purchase flood insurance.

OBJECTIVE 4

Gather Feedback

There are several points during the flood mapping cycle where this is a primary objective, e.g. during the Discovery phase of a flood mapping project.

OBJECTIVE 5

Provide Training

This would apply if the main meeting objective is to help local stakeholders (e.g. insurance experts) learn to use new flood risk products in their interactions with the public.

ONCE AN OBJECTIVE HAS BEEN DEFINED...

think about the criteria you will use to evaluate the success of your meeting and what tools you can use to measure it.

DO'S AND DON'T'S OF ACHIEVING MEETING OBJECTIVES

DO:

- Set an agenda and present the objectives up front.
- Establish and agree on ground rules at the beginning of the meeting to keep the meeting on track.
- Avoid "scope creep." If it's not in line with the current meeting's goals, add it to a "parking lot" to discuss the topic at another time.
- Include the right people at the table. Consider who should be in the room to answer questions or provide information.
- Prepare talking points and ensure all presenters are aware of key points.
- Evaluate the meeting (formally or informally) with attendees and presenters.

DON'T:

- Set too many goals for the meeting. Focus on one or two key areas for discussion.
- Forget the supporting materials. Review exhibits not only for accuracy, but also to ensure that the "right" info and tools are being shared in the best possible way.
- Close the meeting without discussing action items and next steps.

Meeting Format

The meeting format should be shaped around the objective of the meeting. Formats can be combined to further achieve your meeting objectives. For example, a data sharing meeting might lead into a planning activity where stakeholders in a flood study area develop a deeper understanding of their flood risk and attempt to prioritize actions that would mitigate that risk. A public hearing could be broadcast via the web to allow additional participants to listen to the presentation and provide comment through the webinar platform or other identified means.

Below are some examples of common meeting designs that you may choose to use individually or in combination when meeting with the public:

	OBJECTIVE:	USUALLY GOOD FOR:	PRESENTATION METHOD/TOOLS:
Data Sharing State agencies and local partners present information followed by Q&A.	Present project data Communicate updates	Existing relationships or ongoing projects Uncontroversial topics	PowerPoint Posters Videos, helpful when sharing complex methodology
Open House Attendees can arrive any time during set hours to visit informational booths or tables, often staffed by FEMA for FEMA-funded flood study updates, and local and state officials and subject matter experts. Formal comments may be recorded.	Provide opportunity for public comment Inform the public on FEMA flood risk analysis and mapping, or provide project updates	Discussions that require one-on-one time with FEMA staff and other specialists Controversial topics where people may be inclined to grandstand if allowed to provide oral comment	Dot Exercises, helpful when agreement is needed during public meetings Videos, to illustrate steps that communities can take to mitigate risk
Workshop/ Small Group Activities Participants are divided into small groups for discussion.	Gather feedback from participants	Brainstorming sessions Multiple questions or topics being addressed Tabletop exercises Topics that are nuanced for certain groups	Discussion Topic Cards Scenario Discussions

	OBJECTIVE:	USUALLY GOOD FOR:	PRESENTATION METHOD/TOOLS:
Facilitated Large Group Discussion Gathering of 50 or more individuals to discuss a shared interest or focus, and bring up ideas, address problems or give comments.	Consensus building Build in interaction so that everyone can learn from different perspectives and collaborate on outcomes and decisions	Discussions around making the community more resilient Discussions of prioritizing mitigation actions and projects within a jurisdiction Building a solution together	Pre-submitted questions
Stakeholder Briefing Providing high-level overview with external stakeholders, such as the media, local insurance agents, elected officials, the public.	Provide top-line information Inform stakeholders on next steps and calls to action	Project initiation and updates Conferences Circumstances where you want to clearly communicate one message to several audiences	One Page Fact Sheet Take-away Talking Point Videos, to share a clear, concise message
Webinar Convening groups using online technology to share information and collect feedback.	Train audience on subject that requires presentation	Geographically dispersed participants Large number of participants Content that can or should be posted or made available after the event	Presentation materials available offline Videos (permitting technology allows for audio)

Room Set-up

Room set-up, or layout, is important to consider as the layout of a room can help or hinder conversation and discussion.
Below are common set-ups:

U-Shape

This layout allows all participants to see each other and invites discussion. Use this layout for data sharing.

Classroom/Theater

This layout places the focus on the front of the room. It is ideal for presentations, sharing videos, or public hearings and can be used for data sharing meetings and stakeholder briefings.

Round Tables

Participants are separated into small groups, which invites discussion. This layout works well when the number of meeting participants does not allow for a u-shape and is suggested for workshops and small group activities.

Boardroom

Ideal for smaller meetings.

Meeting Content

The content of your meeting will be determined by the objectives and participants, but there are **a few considerations when conducting public meetings:**

- Make attendees feel welcome and that their input is valued and is valuable to the process.
- Greet participants as they enter the room.
- Communicate how the information collected in the meeting will be used.
- Establish ground rules and enforce them.
- Encourage respectful participation (e.g. cell phones on silent, limit side conversations, wait for turn to speak)
- Be clear about time limits for providing oral comments:
    - Implement a system of signing up to speak so a speaking order is established. Determine prior to the meeting if the number of speakers will be limited or if you will extend the meeting time so everyone who wants to speak has a chance to.
    - Set a time limit and enforce the time limit for public comment. Often speakers are limited to two or three minutes. Ensure all meeting staff are aware of the time limit. Communicate the limit to the commenter through cards (green, yellow, red) to passively indicate when participants are out of time.
- Ensure content being presented is accessible to the layperson—avoid jargon and technical terms.
- Provide presenters and meeting staff with training in talking with the media, conflict resolution, empathy, and presentation skills.
- Ensure that action items are captured and that there is accountability for following up with participants on next steps if that is what was promised.
- Discuss how you plan to address action items and follow-up after the meeting.
- Communicate how the public can submit questions and stay engaged following the meeting

Video Series for Community Officials

This series includes eight short videos designed to help understand, relate to, and communicate the objectives of updating the community's flood risk data and maps, including how to use updated flood risk information to increase community resilience. When planning public engagement, reference this series to help prioritize conversations about flood risk.

Facilitation

Facilitators are professionally trained in meeting management and stakeholder involvement. A third-party facilitator can help ensure the meeting runs smoothly and that all attendees have equal input during the meeting. Third-party facilitators are especially useful in situations that may be seen as biased toward a particular outcome. **Facilitators typically do the following:**

- Design the meeting agenda
- Identify the interests of those who will be in the room through research and interviews
- Assist with meeting logistics
- Run all aspects of the meeting and adjust during the meeting as needed
- Ensure that meeting objectives are met, and ground rules are honored
- Assist with tracking meeting follow up

Communication of Public Meeting

During a FEMA flood study, FEMA is required to publicize changes to local flood hazards in the local newspaper when maps are distributed to community officials as preliminary data. This is a good timeframe to conduct a public meeting, elevate conversations about changing flood risk, prompt discussions about personal mitigation, and answer questions. If it has been a while since your community received new maps, there will be questions about the process and people will want to know what has changed and how they may be impacted. Be sure to advertise your meeting well and maximize participation. **Ideas to further promote your meeting include the following:**

Sending emails and making phone calls to key participants

Working with partners to share information about the meeting

Working with FEMA External Affairs to conduct local media outreach

Placing advertisements online and in local newspapers

Sharing information and videos on social media channels

Reference the Social Media Guide on ***FEMA.gov***

Putting flyers in the community announcing the meeting

Translating meeting information into different languages as needed

Chances are you will know the meeting attendees. You can also conduct additional research through a stakeholder assessment to determine the most effective methods for reaching and communicating with your audience. In your conversations with the public, look to identify new community leaders that can help you reach out to, inform, and engage your residents.

KNOW THE REGULATIONS

Many states have some version of an Open Meeting Act (OMA). These generally require "public bodies" to hold open meetings and provide advance notice to the public. Ensure you know the requirements of the OMA for your state. Even when not strictly required, consider erring on the side of transparency.

Common Public Meeting Challenges and Solutions

CHALLENGE:	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:
Same people show up to every meeting/meeting lacks diversity of perspective.	Diversify how and where you advertise public meetings; identify fellow community leaders to encourage participation; consider whether translation services are necessary.
Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) limits the type of information that can be collected from the public.	Ensure any recommendations being provided are those of individuals. Consult the Solicitor's office to ensure your public meeting plan is compliant with the requirements of FACA.
Meeting is dominated by strong personalities.	Employ the services of a facilitator to draw out the opinions of everyone in the room or ensure the meeting lead has facilitation training. Incorporate activities (such as small group discussion or written feedback) that elicit the opinions of everyone in the room.

CHALLENGE:	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:
Location and timing is inconvenient for the meeting invitees.	Consider new locations and times (evenings, weekends) that work for the participants, bring the meeting to events or locations that the public attends or visits. Ask if they have a proposed solution. This information can be identified in a stakeholder assessment.
Misinformation is spread before the meeting occurs.	If this is an issue you anticipate, control the message early by disseminating correct info before the meeting. This can be done via email, a coordinated social media campaign (see the Social Media Guide that is part of this Toolkit), a controlled statement or interview with the media, or even one-on-one calls. Local partners can act as influencers in this situation and help to provide a credible counterpoint. If the issue cannot be contained in advance, begin the meeting by briefly acknowledging the misinformation and providing correct details. Uniformity of messaging across platforms and social media platforms is important.
Expecting a large turnout due to controversy.	Using a facilitator (or ensuring the meeting lead has facilitation training) when a controversial topic is being discussed can prevent the meeting from being overtaken by negative and unproductive discussion. Briefly address the controversy and share a plan for the next steps. Then, provide opportunities for feedback (e.g. one-on-one tables, comment forms or small group break outs) to ensure that participants feel heard.
Highly technical topic with an audience that is varied in technical knowledge/understanding.	Open the meeting by level-setting with definitions and frequently asked questions. Use graphics, videos, and plain language as much as possible and provide ample time for questions during and after the meeting. Consider using a story map (if available) or playing content from one of the short videos that are part of this Toolkit on **FEMA.gov**.

Measuring Success

Success is measured by determining how effective the meeting was at achieving the intended goals. Additional factors to consider:

- Were the intended meeting participants present?
- Was the number of participants sufficient to accomplish the meeting goals?
- Did you get the input you were looking for?

Every meeting should include an evaluation form where participants can provide feedback and suggestions for improvement. Meeting staff should also debrief by documenting what worked well and what needs to be improved. Suggestions for improvement should be implemented at the next set of public meetings.