Shared decision-making

Shared decision-making includes processes that aim to resolve disputes between the parties involved and enable them to agree on decisions at hand. The definitions of the processes vary between authors and institutions, and lines between processes are blurred. The definitions used by The Environmental Council are used here. In Negotiation, people consult directly with each other, exchanging ideas and offers about possible outcomes. Each of the participating groups advocates for its own interests. Mediation is a process in which disputing parties meet together and separately in confidence with a neutral third party to explore and determine how the dispute between them is to be resolved. Mediation can be seen as a way to extending negotiation. Mediation characteristically focuses on issues of specific conflict and involves smaller numbers of people compared to facilitation. Similar to mediation, Facilitation is more widely used, and not only to resolve conflict. It usually involves larger numbers of people and is used in multiparty and multi-issue situations where parties can work together. Arriving at a consensus is one means of decision-making in which the above methods can be used as part of the process. The process starts with the whole group defining the problem and exploring possible solutions. The group is then divided into subgroups, which review the issues and produce more detailed solutions. In the end, the groups report back, look for consensus, and identify remaining issues. The whole process can be repeated when necessary.

Planning and consultation meeting between foresters, recreation rangers and representatives from disabled access group.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- The third party (mediator or facilitator) should be well trained and experienced in the principles and practice of the process and skilled in breaking deadlocks.

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING:

INVOLVING:

PARTNERSHIP: ★★★

Strengths

- A facilitator or a mediator can help the parties to move forward from deadlocked situations.
- Mediation is a good preventative tool and can be used effectively to stop problems escalating.
- Ownership of the decision made by the involved parties is of high level compared to other ways of making decisions, such as voting.
- Mediation and negotiation are considerably flexible and can be used in various situations and time frames.

Weaknesses

- Time and labour requirements are considerable.
- The process usually requires significant management and organisation.
- It may be difficult to identify who the parties are and whom they represent.
- If parties do not have shared incentives to negotiate or reach consensus, the probability of success is low.

Continued overleaf

Weaknesses continued:

- An impartial third party facilitator or mediator hired for a long period of time may be expensive.

- The facilitator needs to be able to recognise when facilitation is not enough and mediation is required instead.

Equipment

- Good meeting facilities which contribute to efficient discussion as necessary.

Time

- Plenty of time is usually required to build a compromise.

Useful sources of information

Books

- The guide to effective participation. D. Wilcox (1994). Partnerships Books, London.

Web

- The Guide to Effective Participation by David Wilcox: www.partnerships.org.uk
- Guidelines for facilitation are provided by FAO: www.fao.org/Participation/ft_faclt.jsp

Training

- The Environment Council runs courses in 'Stakeholder Dialogue': tel. 020 7632 0103 or www.the-environment-council.org.uk
- Courses and information on mediation are provided by Mediation UK: tel. 0117 9046661 or www.mediationuk.org.uk

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

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