



Working groups

Working groups offer an effective participation means for interested stakeholder groups. They help participants to familiarise themselves with the planning issues and keep them and their stakeholder groups constantly in touch with the process. A Working group is normally fairly small, ideally between 5 and 12 people. Before forming a group, the stakeholders have to be carefully assessed. The purpose and role of the group in planning should be clearly identified before starting the group work. At the first meeting, the inclusiveness and the tasks and common rules of the group should be agreed and the planning process and aims should be explained. One of the group's goals is to clarify different opinions and try to build consensus. Working groups try to arrive at solutions through dialogue rather than voting on issues.



BME disability Champions provide long term involvement and support developing ideas and actions.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Good communication, listening and co-operation skills are necessary.

Equipment

- Meeting facilities that enable effective group working are needed.

Time

- It is good practice to agree upon a time limit for the length of time the Working group will be constituted.
- The time scale may vary greatly between groups set up for different purposes.

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★★

INVOLVING: ★★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★★

Strengths

- Interested people can become actively involved and contribute to the process.
- Group working provides a good chance for in-depth interaction and negotiations.
- Members' knowledge about the planning topics and objectives of different interest groups increases.
- Group working gives immediate feedback to the planning team during the whole process.

Weaknesses

- Working group members may have to commit a lot of time and energy to the work.
- Usually only a few individuals constitute a Working group.

Useful sources of information

Books

- The guide to effective participation. D. Wilcox (1994). Partnerships Books, London.
- Participatory approach to natural resource management: a guide book. T. Loikkanen (1999). Forest and Park Service, Finland.

Web

- The Guide to Effective Participation by David Wilcox: www.partnerships.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