

Module 4: Public Participation

Public participation is the process by which public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision making. It is two-way communication and interaction, with the overall goal of better decisions that are supported by the public.

- Public participation applies to **administrative decisions**—that is, those typically made by agencies (and sometimes by private organizations), not elected officials or judges.
- Public participation is not just providing **information to the public**. There is interaction between the organization making the **decision and people who want to participate**.
- There is an **organized process for involving the public**. It is not something that happens accidentally or coincidentally.
- The participants have some level of impact or **influence on the decision** being made.

International Association for Public Participation

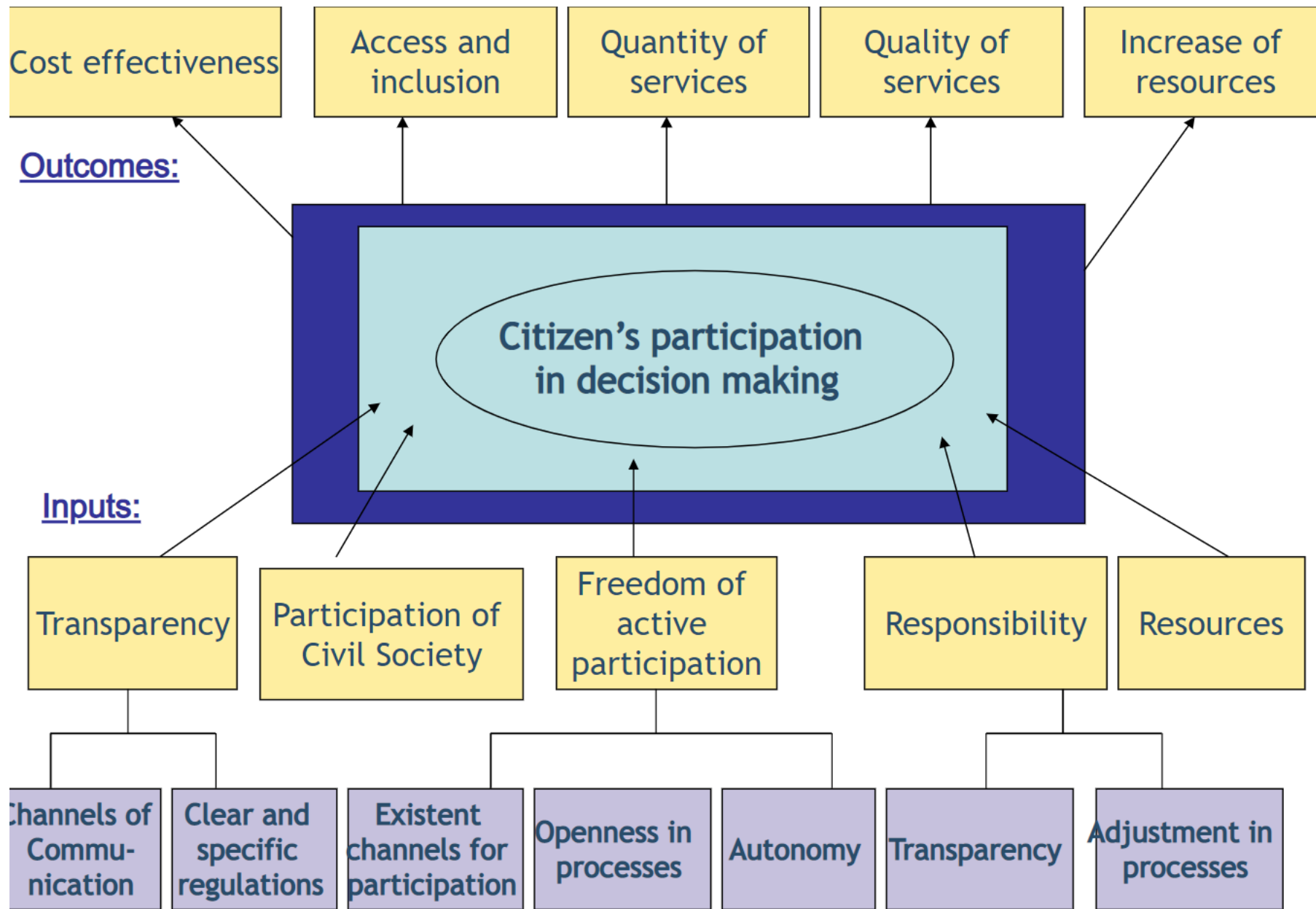
- The public should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.
- Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
- The public participation process communicates the interests and meets the process needs of all participants.
- The public participation process seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected.
- The public participation process involves participants in defining how they participate.
- The public participation process provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

What Does *Participation* Mean?

- Some people use it as if it were synonymous with public information programs—getting the word out to the public.
- It is frequently used to describe public hearings at which the public comments on what an agency proposes to do.
- It has also been used to imply that an agreement is reached with the public that will be affected by it.

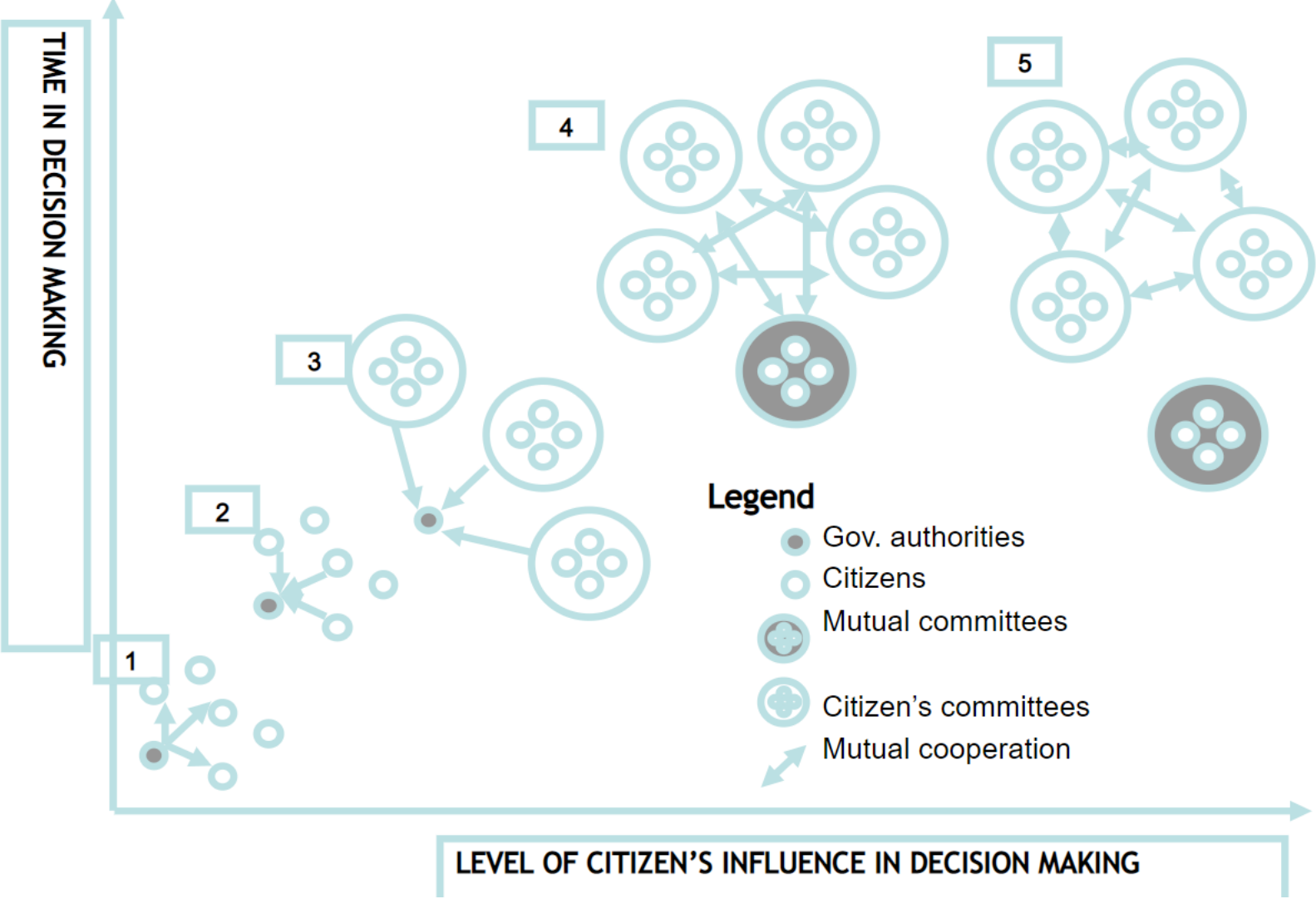
It aims to empower citizens, to give them better access to information and better forums for debate because ' information is power '. Clearly, this requires cooperation from civil society organizations (CSOs). CSOs are well placed to organize polls, petitions, trans-national forums for debate on the web in order to enable citizens to make their voices heard.

Margot Wallstrom, Vice President of the EU Commission
3 October, 2007 - European Citizen Action Service

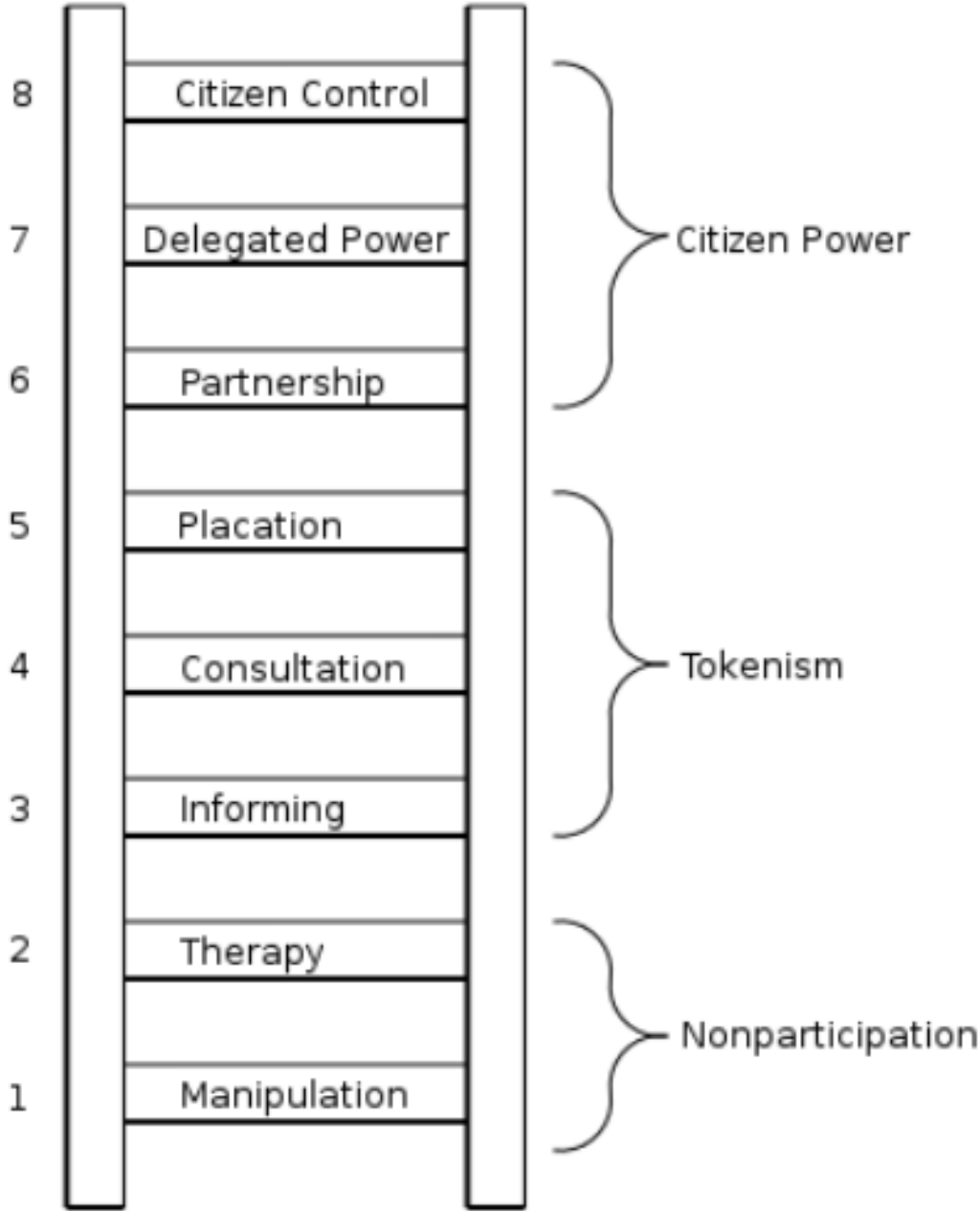


Level of citizen's influence in decision making

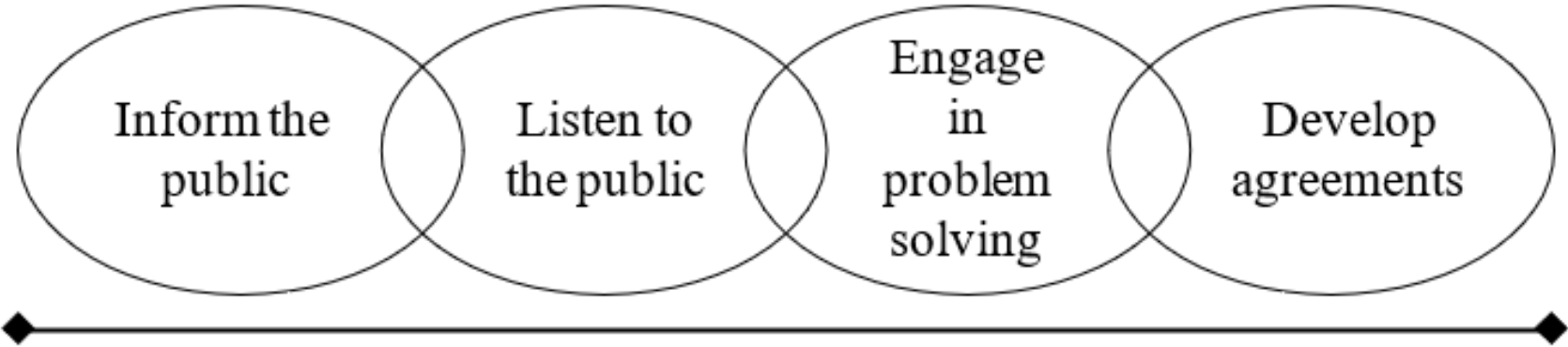
- Establishment of channels and bodies for mutual cooperation-



Ladder of Participation



CONTINUUM OF PARTICIPATION

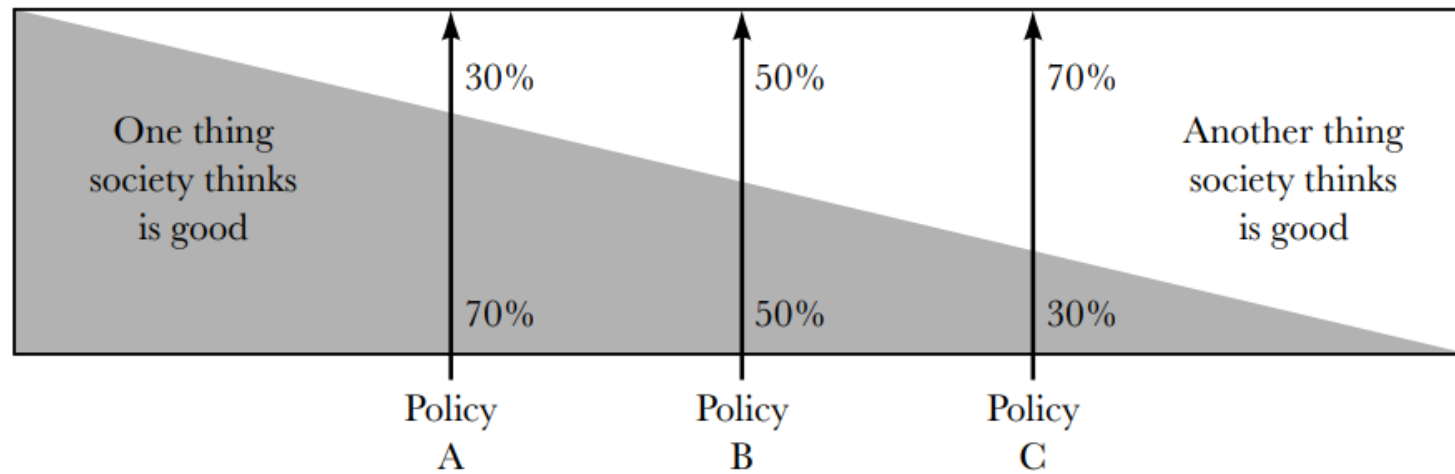


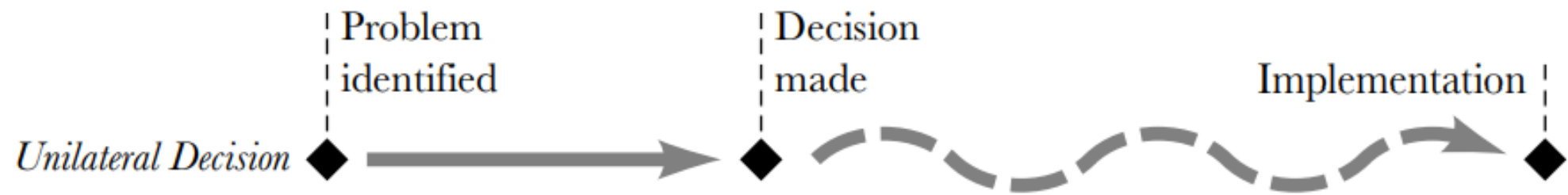
Procedural Public Participation

Two mechanisms for improved participation:

- 1) Public hearings, at which the public can comment on proposed actions, and increased access to information, by issuing reports (for example, environmental impact statements) or
- 1) Establishing information repositories, locations where the public has access to all relevant studies and documents.

Rationale Public Participation

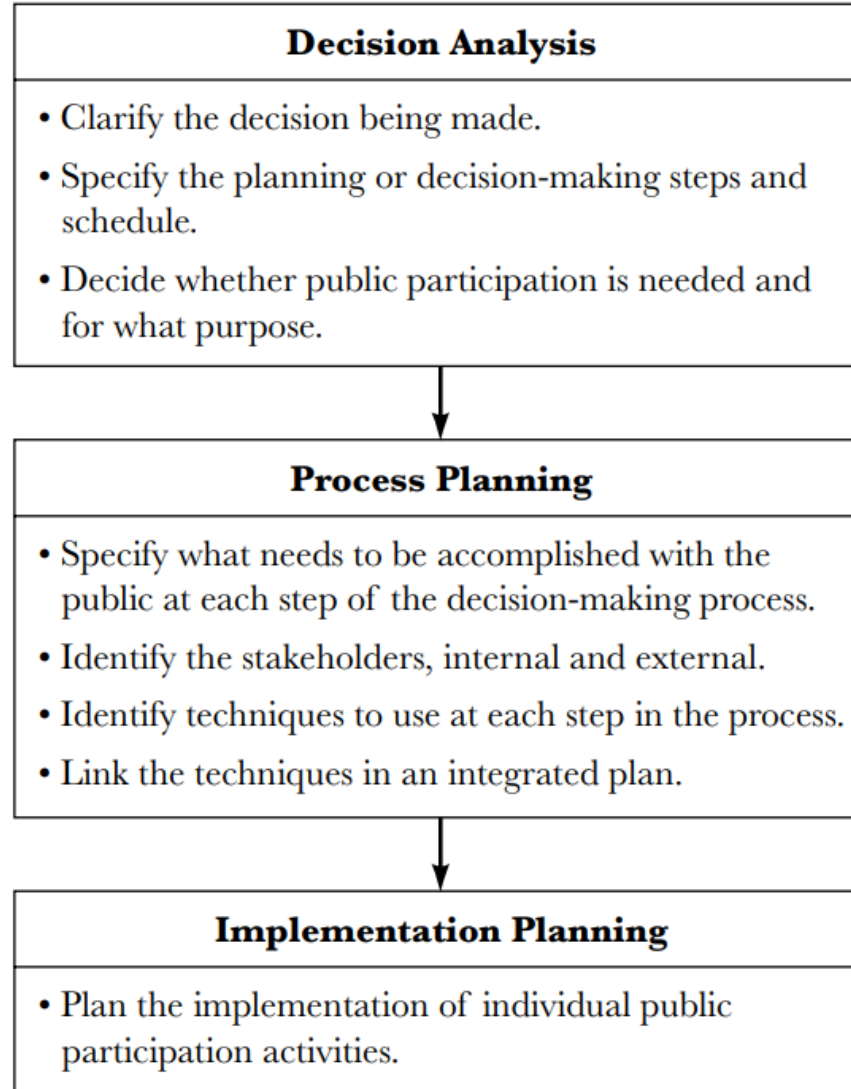




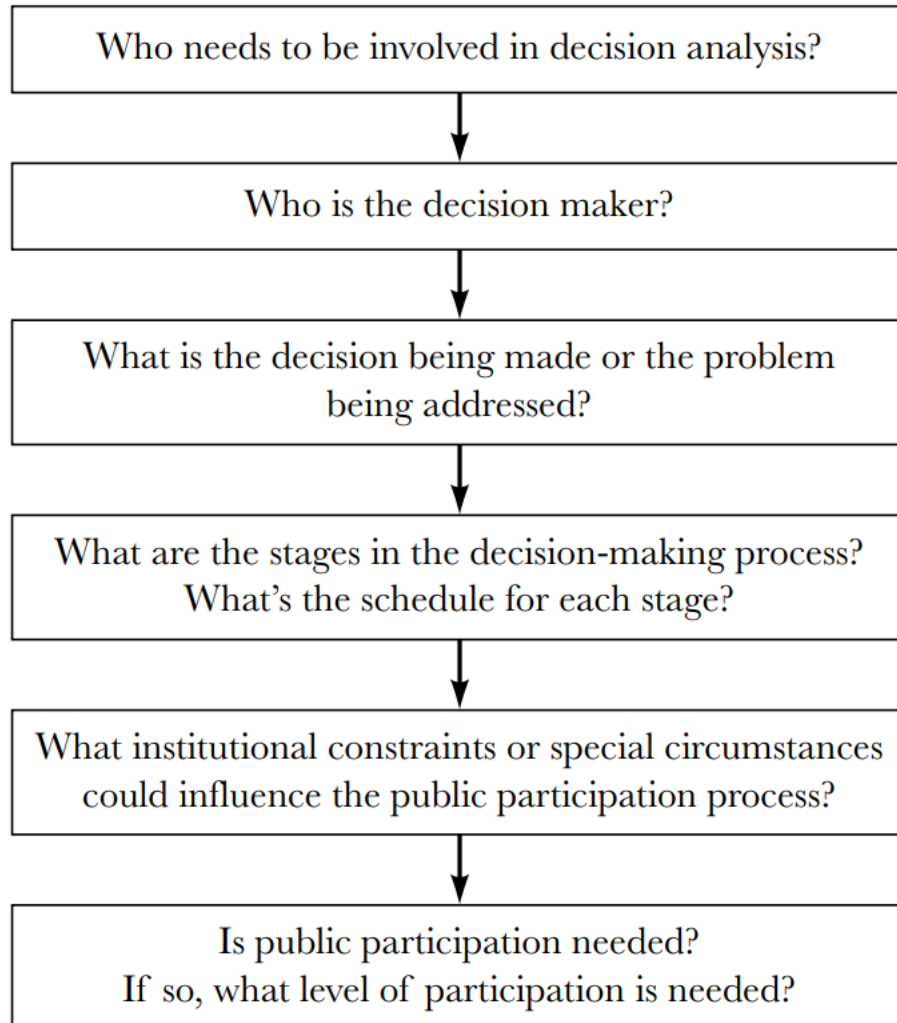
Benefits of Public Participation

- 1) Improved quality of decisions.
- 2) Minimizing cost and delay.
- 3) Consensus building.
- 4) Increased ease of implementation
- 5) Avoiding worst-case confrontations
- 6) Anticipating public concerns and attitudes
- 7) Developing civil society

Stages of Public Participation

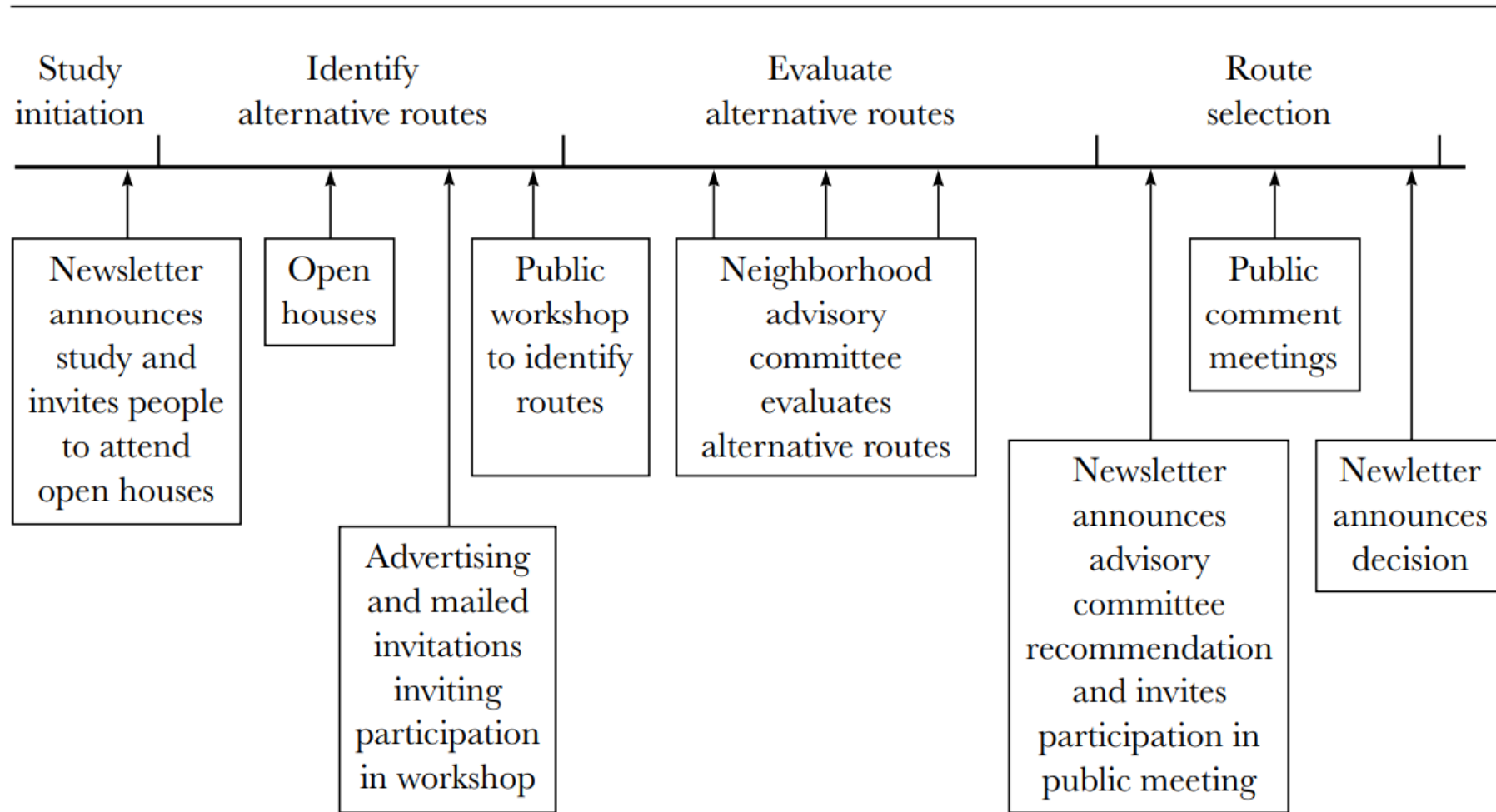


Decision Analysis



Stage in the Process	Objective
Define the problem	Obtain a complete identification and understanding of how the problem is viewed by all significant interests. Identify the level of public interest in the issue.
Establish evaluation criteria	Identify a complete list of possible criteria for evaluating alternatives. Agree on evaluation criteria.
Identify alternatives	Develop a complete list of all possible alternative actions.
Evaluate alternatives	Develop a complete understanding of the impacts of the various alternatives as viewed by the public. Assess the relative merit assigned to alternatives by various interests.
Select a course of action	Determine which alternative would be the most acceptable.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES ON A TIME LINE.



Technique	Usefulness	Limitations
Public hearing	<p>Anyone can make a comment and have it recorded (verbatim)</p> <p>Highly transparent; everybody can hear what everybody else said</p>	<p>Often results in speeches rather than discussion</p> <p>Can be controlled or manipulated by an organized group</p> <p>Little or no interaction</p>
Public comment meeting/town meeting	<p>Anyone can make a comment and have it recorded (but not usually verbatim)</p> <p>Highly transparent; everybody can hear what everybody else said</p> <p>Somewhat less formal than a public hearing</p>	<p>Often results in speeches rather than discussion</p> <p>Can be controlled or manipulated by an organized group</p> <p>Little or no interaction</p>
Briefing, question and answer	<p>Useful for providing information to the public</p> <p>Question-and-answer period permits clarification</p>	<p>No value for obtaining public comment, although the session can be followed by a comment period</p>

Panels	<p>A more interactive way of conducting a briefing</p> <p>Permits discussion of informed viewpoints</p>	<p>No value for obtaining public comment, although the panel can be followed by a comment period.</p>
Large group/ small group	<p>Combines the benefits of large meetings (everybody receives the same information) with the interaction provided by small group discussions</p> <p>Can be used to produce a product or complete a task, but the agency will need to resolve differences in products produced by the small groups</p> <p>Interaction leads to higher audience participation and enthusiasm than other large meeting formats</p>	<p>Logistics can become cumbersome; careful planning required</p> <p>An angry audience may refuse to break into small groups</p> <p>Organized groups may dominate a few small groups (but not the entire meeting)</p>
Workshop	<p>Targeted at producing an actual product or completing a task (for example, identifying a set of alternatives or ranking alternatives)</p>	<p>Typically for twenty-five participants or fewer; may need to be repeated multiple times if more people want to participate</p>

Open house	<p>Allows participants to come to the meeting whenever they want (during the announced hours), get information, then leave</p> <p>Allows prolonged interaction between individuals and experts on topics of interest</p> <p>People can leave comments on flip charts at each station or on hand-in response form</p>	<p>No visibility for what other people are saying</p> <p>Activist groups often do not like open houses because they do not give them an audience to address</p>
Coffee klatch	<p>Provides an opportunity for in-depth discussion in an informal setting</p> <p>Meeting in a private home leads to a friendlier, less adversarial setting</p>	<p>Can be staff intensive; may need to hold a number of coffee klatches to reach the intended audience</p>
Symposium	<p>Opportunity to provide information, including conflicting viewpoints, in a setting where people can think about the information without being put on the spot to respond</p>	<p>Not a forum for gathering public comment</p>

Samoaan Circle

Gives the experience of a small group conversation or dialogue, but can be observed (and participated in) by a much larger audience

Largely self-monitoring (no meeting leader required once meeting started)

Leads to interaction but not necessarily to agreements

People may be skeptical at first, since the format is unfamiliar

Open Space

People get to discuss the topics of greatest concern or interest to them
Process is open and visible; people can move around to other groups whenever they want

Agency cannot prescribe the topics to discuss, so it is possible participants will not address topics of concern to the agency

Requires meeting space with many venues for discussion and substantial premeeting logistics

Format typically requires two to three days