THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF USDA RURAL UTILITY PROJECTS

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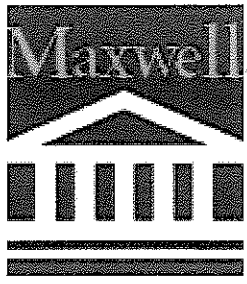

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Study Objective

The Maxwell School Consulting Team (hereafter referred to at "the Team") was asked by the USDA Rural Utility Service ("the Client") to study the use of public participation in water and wastewater projects in rural communities in New York State. The Client asked the Team to assess the extent to which public participation leads to project success and to make recommendations on improving the use of public participation.

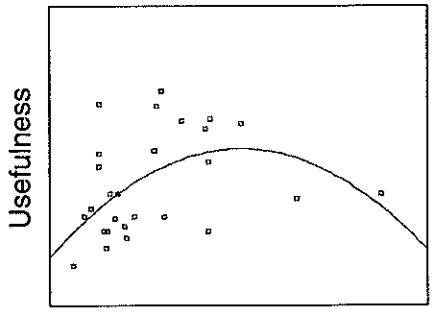
Methodology

The Team developed working definitions of "public participation" and "project success." Based on these definitions, the Team designed a survey aimed to measure the amount of public participation that occurred in a given community. The survey instrument also measured the perception of the respondent (the community's mayor or supervisor) as to the usefulness of public participation in achieving project success. The Team conducted 31 phone interviews and explored the administrative records of a sample of rural communities eligible for USDA funding. Data from the surveys and agency files were then aggregated into a database and analyzed.

Findings

All of the projects studied were accompanied by some degree of public participation, ranging from a community that conducted only two public hearings to one that had 12 public hearings, eight roundtables, 12 public notices and a newsletter. Despite this variation, the results show that *every* respondent feels that public participation contributes to project success. When asked to react to the statement, "Using public participation led to an overall better project," all respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Additionally, there is agreement among the respondents that using public participation (1) enables communities to make better long-term planning decisions; (2) helps citizens accept the real cost of providing new services; and (3) increases the community's satisfaction with the decision-making process.

A regression model was created to analyze and identify quantitative trends in the data. The amount of public participation that a community used was compared to respondents' perceptions about the role of public participation in achieving project success. In general, as officials use more public participation, their perception of its effectiveness rises as well. At very high levels, however, the trend reverses and perceptions of the usefulness of public participation decrease. This trend suggests that moderate levels of public participation help mayors achieve project success.



The Team also used regression analysis to compare projects that used a neutral facilitator to those that did not. When asked to react to the statement "Because we used public participation, potential delays to the project were averted," respondents that had used a neutral facilitator were far more likely to agree than communities that did not use a facilitator. One interpretation of this

finding is that neutral facilitators help community leaders identify and respond to diverse interests, removing potential roadblocks to the project.

The Team also analyzed responses to open-ended questions and identified a number of consistent themes: Public hearings seem to be the easiest and most useful method of public participation employed by the respondents. In addition, public participation lends itself to mutual education: decision-makers gain a better understanding of a community's needs, while stakeholders are informed about the need for and impacts of the project. Many respondents suggest that mayors and supervisors try to involve and inform the public as early and often as possible. Additionally, several officials encourage other community leaders to respond to citizens' concerns quickly and with accurate technical information for the smoothest possible process. Finally, the respondents offered a number of suggestions for the USDA to improve the use of public participation.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, as well as the suggestions of the respondents, the Team recommends that the Client take the following of steps to enhance the use of public participation:

- Provide public officials with a "Public Participation Kit" that gives them an overview of how to use public participation effectively;
- Provide forums for former and current USDA customers to share experiences and advice;
- Encourage public officials to approach their constituency with a concrete plan of action, while being open and accepting to change;
- Encourage officials to educate and inform the public as early as possible and to gauge public sentiment before expending substantial funds;
- Share the findings of this study with communities considering a USDA utility project to inform them of the usefulness of public participation.

AGENCY BACKGROUND

THE USDA RURAL UTILITY SERVICE

The mission of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is to preserve and improve the quality of life in rural America. The USDA contends that the quality of life in rural America should be equivalent to that in urban and suburban America. To this end, the USDA funds projects for private housing, business development, and infrastructure improvement in rural, often low-income communities.

The USDA Department of Rural Utilities Services (RUS) concentrates on telecommunication, electrical power, and water and wastewater systems. The following analysis focuses on USDA's efforts to meet the needs of the 3.8 million Americans who lack safe, dependable water. As a lender of last resort, the USDA offers attractive loan and grant packages to rural communities in need of water and wastewater improvements who are unable to secure private loans. Funding may be used by municipalities to construct or make improvements to water supply, distribution and disposal infrastructure. Interest rates on typical USDA loans range from four to five percent, and loan terms are capped at 40 years.[1]

THE ROLE OF THE MUNICIPALITY

In order to obtain USDA funding, municipalities must follow several steps in an application process. See Appendix A for an explanation of the USDA application procedure. Before approaching the USDA or beginning the application process, town or village officials are generally aware of the needs of their community. Moreover, municipalities often contact the USDA *after* a plan has been designed and circulated. In recent years, the USDA has encouraged community officials to involve the public in the planning, application and implementation stages of water and wastewater projects. The agency hopes that the use of public participation will lead to more successful rural utility projects.

WHAT IS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION?

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: A DEFINITION

According to the World Bank, public participation is a process through which stakeholders can influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.[2] In this analysis, public participation is defined as the extent to which community members concerned and impacted by a rural utility project are aware of and able to influence a decision regarding the project or issue in question.

Public participation addresses problems related to information asymmetry and thus increases citizens' ability to engage in the decision-making process. Public involvement mechanisms enhance accountability, transparency, and thus democracy, by:

- incorporating public values into decisions;
- resolving conflict among competing interests;
- building trust in institutions; and
- educating and informing the public.

In addition, public participation in community planning allows stakeholders to discuss the potential impacts of project proposals and their interests in achieving or obviating those outcomes. It fosters connections and partnerships between organizations and places emphasis on reaching a common understanding of issues and finding a shared vision of dealing with them.[3]

Furthermore, public participation helps to generate commitment from various stakeholders. In theory, public involvement fosters the community support which leads to more effective and sustainable projects.[4] The research conducted by the Team intends to evaluate the veracity of this claim.

METHODS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

According to Beierle, "methods for engaging the public in decision-making range along a continuum from informal consultations with individual citizens to highly formalized processes of agreement seeking among organized nongovernmental interest groups."[5]

In this research, the Team focuses primarily on focus groups, public hearings, surveys and roundtables. The descriptions of these four methods are based both upon research and the Team's own discussion of the theory.[6]

Public Hearings

Public hearings are a form of public meetings, limited in size, that generally involve experts and citizens interested in the specific proposal being discussed.

Public hearings are an appropriate forum for informing citizenry about an identified need or proposed project. As a vehicle for education, hearings can minimize the potential for conflict. Public hearings are most successful when preceded by a "pre-submission" phase, which provides stakeholders with time to become familiar with the issues.

Public hearings, however, can be easily abused. Hearings may be dominated by special interest groups or planned at a time/place that is not convenient for all interested parties. A public hearing, for instance, at 9 AM on a Monday morning will necessarily exclude certain people. Feedback obtained from this format thus must be treated carefully because it may not be representative of all community interests.

Surveys

Surveys are a tool used to solicit information from a representative sample of citizens. The same questions are asked of every individual surveyed and ultimately compiled to create a picture of the needs, interests and concerns of the entire population.

Surveys have the potential to reach large numbers of people, soliciting their opinions and informing them of possible future change. Surveys may also be used for longitudinal studies (e.g., monitoring change over time). Surveys are an appropriate mechanism for use, especially in the beginning stages of a project, to provide decision-makers with relevant information regarding stakeholder interests.

Among the inherent dangers of surveys is the possibility of generating a non-representative sample. The effectiveness of surveys is heavily affected by response rates. Additionally, questions must be simple and straightforward to ensure that respondents can answer accurately. The information gathered from such questions, however, may be overly simplistic and superficial. Finally, survey design and implementation are time-consuming processes and is not appropriate if quick results are desired.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are one-time discussions of a particular issue, involving a homogenous group of 6-12 individuals that broadly represent a singular segment of society. Focus groups are informal and are structured to encourage open discussion among participants.

Focus groups offer an appropriate venue for learning about the needs or interests of a particular group. Because the groups are homogenous and largely informal, participants can discuss issues more openly. Successful focus groups may lead to agreement within the group and feelings of enrichment among participants. Focus groups may also present a forum for educating the public if the persons involved return to their respective communities with relevant information.

Focus groups, however, may generate only superficial discussion if participants are not well-informed. In addition, selection criteria can create bias in eliciting opinions, and limiting the number of participants narrows the representativeness of opinions expressed. There is also potential for ideas to be suppressed by other group members if a neutral, trained facilitator is not

employed. Finally, focus groups are resource intensive and therefore not a feasible option for every community.

Roundtables

A roundtable is comprised of approximately 25-30 invited guests with diverse interests, convened to discuss issues related to a project. Ideally, roundtables are guided by a neutral facilitator that assists in directing the flow of the discussion and mitigating conflict.

Roundtables allow different parties to discuss and better understand others' interests. Through this process of mutual education, the potential for conflict is mitigatedand the opportunity for consensus is enhanced. In addition, the debate that occurs at roundtables provides decision-makers with information that may be essential to the effectiveness or sustainability of the project. If used early on in the discussion of an issue, roundtables may be used to develop alternative options. Finally, roundtables can act as a forum to generate community support by assuring all parties that their interests will be met to the extent possible.

The roundtable process must be carefully followed to ensure success rather than disaster. If, for example, all interested parties are not invited to the session, an illusion of consensus may be created, although key interests have been omitted. Additionally, roundtables build parties' expectations that their concerns will be fully addressed, although this is not always possible.

The correct use of public participation through the aforementioned methods help to ensure public input in government decision-making process. Public involvement, in turn, is essential to accountability, transparency and civic engagement—the building blocks of democratic governance.

In the following sections, the Team evaluates the role that public participation plays in the development of rural utilities project funded by the USDA.

STUDY OBJECTIVE

The Maxwell School Consulting Team (hereafter referred to at "the Team") was asked by the USDA Rural Utility Service ("the Client") to study the use of public participation in water and wastewater projects in rural communities in New York State. The Client asked the Team to assess the extent to which public participation leads to project success and to make recommendations on improving the use of public participation.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The Team follows USDA guidelines in determining the population for this study. The USDA funds rural utility projects in New York State communities of less than 10,000 that are unable to receive commercial loans. Towns and villages that meet this criteria and are in need of water or wastewater improvements comprise the population for this study.

The sample used to represent this population was derived from a list of 47 communities provided to the Team by the Client that fit the population parameters. All of the communities included in the sample had already been funded by the USDA, or were in the process of requesting funding for a water or wastewater project. This condition (the lack of a control or comparison group) places limitations on the teams ability to measure the extent to which public participation leads to project success.

DEFINING SUCCESS

The Team's objective, as stated above, is to assess the relationship between public involvement and the successful development of rural utility projects. In order to develop standards by which to evaluate the success of a project, the Team first had to understand the Client's conception of "success." The Team determined that a project is generally successful when a community's water or wastewater needs are correctly identified and adequately addressed. Within this broad definition, however, there are various degrees of success that a community or project can achieve. The Team created four broad categories of success: the agency perspective; project administration; the community perspective; and planning and development.

The agency's perspective of success is generally concerned with cost-effectiveness and meeting regulatory (i.e., environmental and health) standards. A successful project from the perspective of the USDA—and from Congress who funds them—ensures minimum water and wastewater services for rural communities; ensures that minimum environmental and health standards are met; and ensures that communities do not find themselves in emergency situations. In addition, a successful project places a minimum burden on the USDA, allowing the agency to sponsor a maximum number of projects. Thus, communities that contribute substantially to the development of a rural utility project and exhaust all other funding options can achieve success from the Federal perspective.

A successful project from the administrative perspective is planned and implemented within a reasonable amount of time. Given the variety in the types of projects funded by the USDA, "reasonable" is highly variable. Generally, however, a project may be considered a success if there are no unnecessary or unforeseen delays in the planning stage due to poor political processes, or in the construction phase due to poor planning, communication or controversy.

From the community's perspective—both the citizens and the local officials—a successful project meets the needs of the community without constituting an unreasonable financial burden. Additionally, success is achieved when there is community support for a project and conflict is averted. This measure of success, of course, is closely related to administrative success: if conflict can be averted, there are less likely to be unnecessary delays.

Finally, a project may be evaluated from a planning and development perspective, wherein success connotes a project's local and regional sustainability. High-quality planning takes long-term economic needs into consideration, attracting business and building capacity for growth. Furthermore, the Team recognizes that a project that is founded upon communication or coordination between communities promotes knowledge-sharing and economies of scale, and is thus more successful.

DATA COLLECTION

Survey Design

In order to assess the relationship between public participation and the successful development of rural water and wastewater projects, the Team developed a survey to be conducted by phone interview. The survey was comprised of quantitative, scaled opinion, and open-ended qualitative questions. See Appendix B for the completed survey instrument.

The first section of the survey contains questions aimed at collecting relevant background information about the town or village and the project it was pursuing. For example, the respondents were asked who initiated the project and whether they considered the project to be controversial.

The second section is intended to assess the amount of public participation that the communities used in project development and implementation. The survey also captures with what methods were used and when public involvement was solicited. Questions regarding the maintenance of public records and the use of a neutral facilitator address the need for accountability and quality when using public participation.

Section three measures the perceptions of community leaders regarding the usefulness of public participation and the relationship between public involvement and project outcome. Numerous statements about public participation are read to the respondent, who indicates whether they strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree or feel neutral about the statement.

The last section is comprised of open-ended questions that solicit community leaders' opinions about the general application process, benefits of public participation and suggestions for other mayors/supervisors and/or the USDA.

Survey Implementation

Several drafts of the survey were designed and revised before being test piloted on May 21, 2003. Following the pilot interview, three modifications were made. Between May 21 and May 29, 2003, the Team conducted the remainder of the phone interviews.[7] A success rate of 64 percent was achieved, resulting in 31 completed surveys. Each community to complete a survey was given an identification number. These numbers, and not community names, are used within the report and appendices to ensure complete confidentiality of the respondents.

To enhance the reliability of the survey and the consistency of the results, the interviews were conducted by only two Team members. The interviewers rehearsed the phone surveys prior to conducting the interviews and consulted with each other over the course of the survey period to maintain consistent data collection. Thus, questions were asked in a consistent manner and answers were coded similarly.

Administrative Records

In order to assess the success of water and wastewater projects funded by the USDA, the Team relied upon USDA administrative records in addition to the survey results. The file for each town or village contained one or more of the following: communication between the community and USDA; contracts between the community and hired engineers or consultants (the agency is the overseer of these contracts); communication between the community and other regulatory agencies; examples of public involvement efforts; and newspaper articles relevant to the project.

The Team used USDA records to determine how long it took a community to move through the process of developing a water or wastewater system with USDA funding. In a few cases, there was a letter in the file from the Department of Health (DOH) or Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) mandating that the community come into compliance with certain standards, or a copy of a public petition demanding water or wastewater improvements. More often, however, the earliest noteworthy date available was when the community requested a determination of funding eligibility from the USDA. See Appendix A for an explanation of the application process. Other relevant dates noted by the Team were: notification of eligibility from the agency; application for Federal assistance from the community; approval of funding; and the date of the loan closing. Unfortunately, this data was not available consistently across all files. Hence, the Team relied on the two most consistently available records to assess the length of time a community spent in the application process: the Application for Federal Assistance and the Request for Obligation of Funds.[8]

This data was collected in order to identify a possible relationship between the length of project design and development and the use of public participation. The data collected by the Team, however, reflected only the length of the application process; reliable data was not available regarding when the communities first began discussions and planning.

In addition to the length of the process, the Team also hoped to use the ability of a municipality to obtain funding as an indicator of success. As mentioned above, however, every community in the sample had already received funding or was still going through the application process.

As indicated above, a successful project places minimum burden on the USDA and allows it to maximize the number of communities it assists. Thus, whether a community acquired funding from other sources to supplement the USDA funds is a valuable indicator. The Team collected information regarding the presence of co-funding.

ANALYSIS DESIGN

The design of the survey and the systematic exploration of the administrative records allows for three types of analysis to be conducted: qualitative, descriptive and quantitative. A brief explanation of these three analyses follows.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis aggregates responses to individual items on the survey into descriptive statistics. Such statistics include the average, median, minimum and maximum values given in response to a particular question. This method is used primarily in this study to describe responses to questions pertaining to the use of public participation. Descriptive results help the USDA understand the general picture of how often and to what extent public participation is used in projects.

Quantitative Analysis

In quantitative analysis, the Team uses SPSS, a statistical software package, to identify any correlations between the level of Public Participation and the success of a project. The first step in assessing this link is to create a composite score for both public participation and for success, explained in detail in Appendices C and D. Once the composite scores are created, the Team compares the public participation score to the success score to see if and how the two are statistically linked. The public participation score is also compared to the length of the application process and the existence of co-funding.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis looks at all questions from all interviews to identify trends across the whole continuum of experiences with USDA water and wastewater projects. In particular, responses to open-ended questions are scrutinized for patterns of responses and generalizations that can be made about public participation. Additionally, individual responses that may be of particular interest to the client are highlighted.

LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA AND ANALYSES

The Team recognizes a number of limitations to the data with respect to quantitative analysis. First, the communities to be interviewed by the Team were selected in a non-random manner from the population of USDA customers. It is possible that they are not fully representative of the general population of USDA communities eligible for funding.

Second, the communities are all recipients (or pending recipients) of USDA funding and assistance. Hence the analysis lacks a control or comparison group of communities that do not receive USDA funding. This control group would have provided an interesting comparison between those communities that did receive assistance and those that did not.

Finally, the Team struggled with the great variation of each case. The greatest disparities between cases are: who initiated a water or wastewater project (public petition, officials initiative, or regulatory mandate); the size of the community; the location of the community (proximity to a larger city); and how controversial the project was. For example, a project could be designed and implemented successfully with very little public participation if the local property owners gave tacit approval from beginning to end. In contrast, a very controversial project may never get off the ground irregardless of the extent of public participation. Ideally, the study would control for such factors by collecting data from local media sources and surveying other community members. Given the time limitations, however, the Team relied instead on the perceptions of the community leaders.

Despite these limitations, the Team considers the data collected to be useful as a pilot attempt to gauge the effects of public participation on USDA rural utility projects. Data based on perceptions of the respondents are useful to USDA since the respondents typically are important and powerful decision-makers in their communities. Furthermore, the respondents are also typically the main contact persons for USDA and their perceptions can be critical to the success of public participation methods. Finally, even without a comparison group, the data shows enough variation and patterns across other factors that conclusions can be drawn that are useful to USDA decision makers.

FINDINGS

The Team administered the survey to 31 village and town officials from municipalities who have finished, are in the process of constructing, or are applying for funding for water or wastewater projects. In the following sections, the characteristics of communities' projects, their use of public participation, and officials' perceptions about public participation are summarized and aggregate responses to survey questions are discussed.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MUNICIPALITIES

Three different types of rural utility projects were discussed in the 31 surveys. Of the community leaders interviewed, 15 discussed projects involving only water systems, 13 involving only wastewater systems and three involving both.

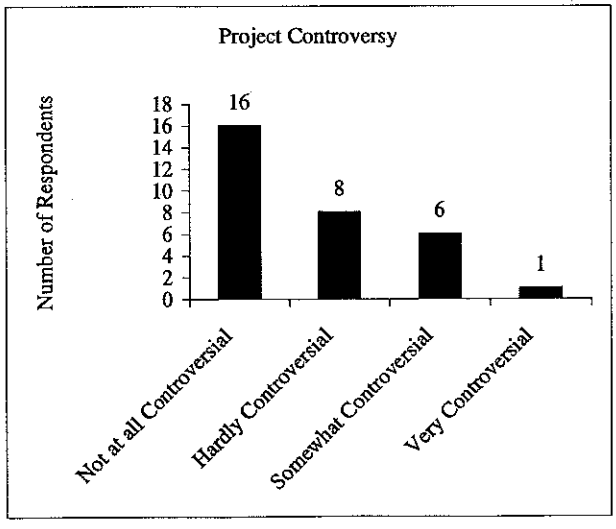
The reasons for the launch of a water and/or wastewater project vary across municipalities. Six projects were pursued as per a mandate of a regulatory agency such as the DOH or DEC. Fifteen projects were initiated by a public petition, and eight were the result of a local official's initiative.

Some municipalities in New York State are required to hold referenda during the project process in order to pursue a project or to dedicate funds. Fifteen municipalities held a referendum on some aspect of their project, 15 either did not require or have not yet had a referendum. This data is significant because a referendum, although not a typical method of public participation, is a useful measure of public sentiment.

Of the 31 projects discussed, 18 systems are currently operational. Thirteen projects are still in planning or under construction. Because nearly half of the projects are not yet complete, the Team is not able to analyze the relationship between public participation and project sustainability.

Village and town officials were asked to gauge the level of controversy associated with the project. Sixteen respondents perceived the project in their community to be not at all controversial while only one indicated that their project was "very controversial" (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

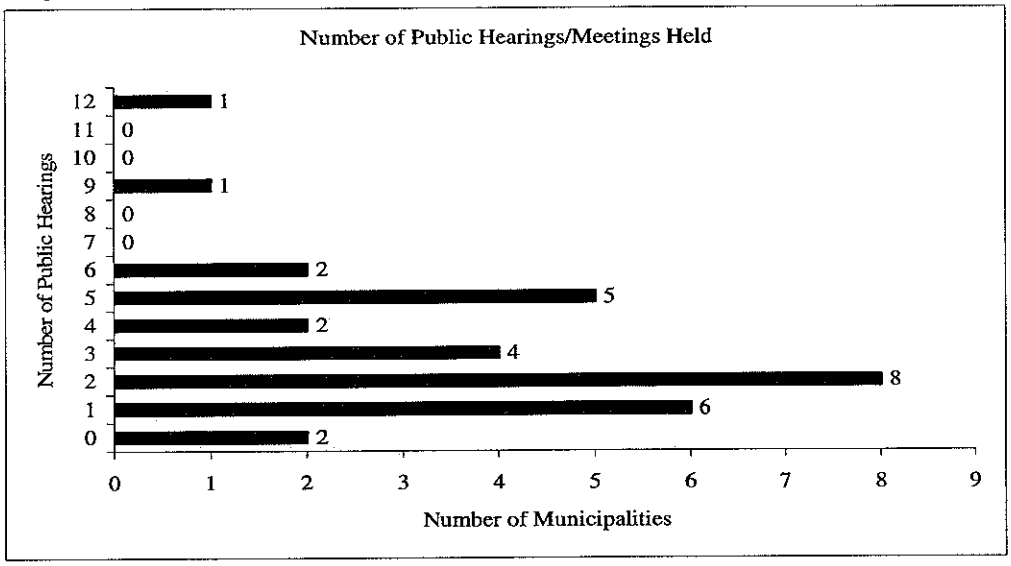


THE USE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public Hearings and Public Meetings

Survey respondents were asked to recall the number of public hearings and/or public meetings held that were relevant to the project. On average, municipalities held 3.3 public hearings and/or public meetings. Nineteen municipalities held less than three, two held zero and one held 12 (see Figure 2). All municipalities made records of hearings and meetings available to the public.

Figure 2.



Roundtables and Focus Groups

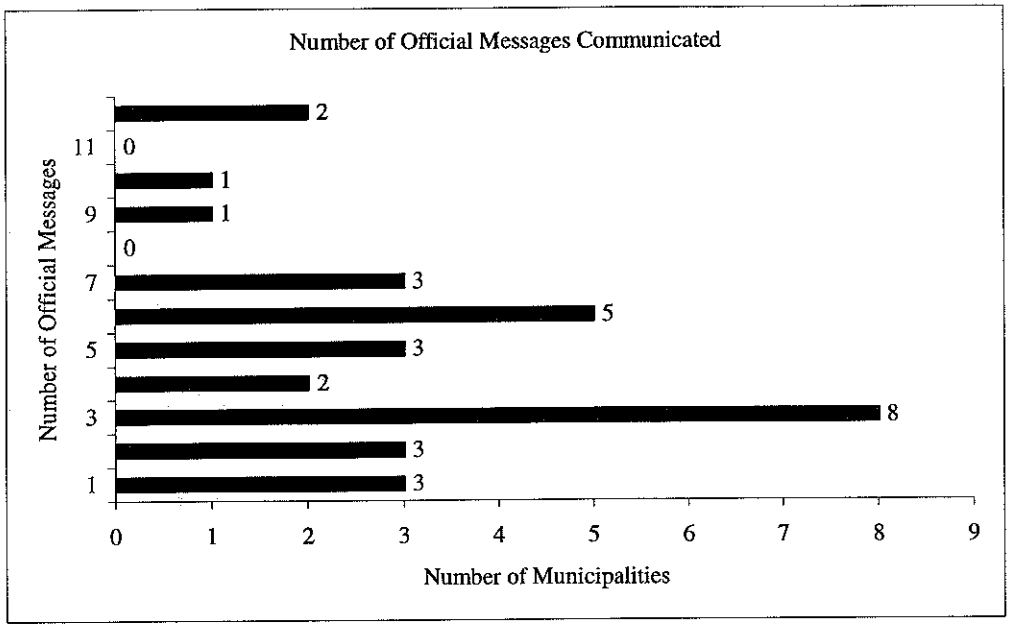
Each official was asked how many roundtable meetings and/or focus groups were held in relation to their community's project. Twelve of the 31 municipalities used roundtables and/or focus groups; of those, the average municipality held 2.9. Five of the 12 municipalities used a neutral facilitator when conducting focus groups or roundtables. Records of the roundtables and focus groups were made available to the public in ten of the 12 municipalities. Seven municipalities held roundtable and focus groups prior to application to the USDA, six municipalities during the application process and three after USDA approval.

Official Written and Broadcast Messages

Officials were asked to estimate the number of official written or broadcast messages that were communicated in regard to the project. All 31 municipalities communicated at least one message. This result was not surprising given the legal requirement to publish a notice of intent to apply for Federal funds. The average municipality communicated 4.8 messages; 14 published

less than four, while three published ten or more (see Figure 3). Twenty-two municipalities communicated messages prior to applying for USDA funds, 22 municipalities during the application process and 14 after obtaining USDA funding approval.

Figure 3.



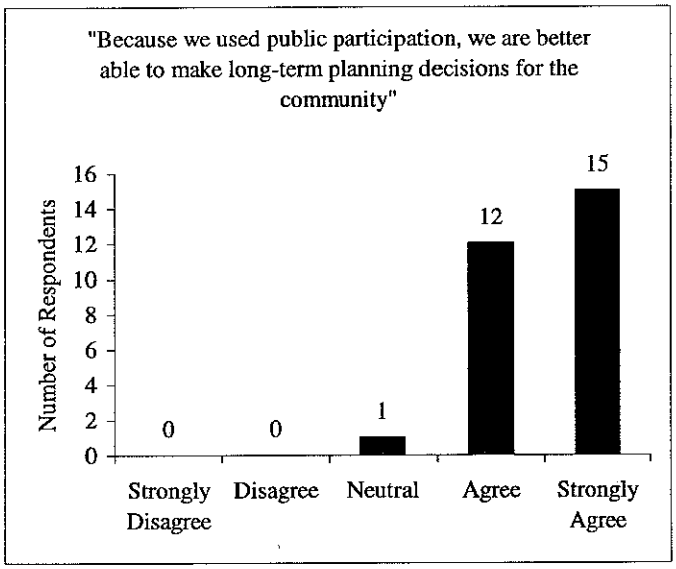
Other Public Participation Methods

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to identify other methods of public participation used in the planning and development of their water and wastewater projects. Twenty-one officials mentioned at least one other method. Nine municipalities surveyed or polled the public during the project and five sent informational letters or newsletters. In one municipality, the official went door to door in the community to discuss the project.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Town and village officials were asked a series of questions aimed at gauging their perceptions of the usefulness of public participation. Possible responses fall on an opinion scale that ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Respondents were also given the option to refrain from offering their perception if they did not feel that the statement applied to their project or community. A complete tally of responses can be found in Appendix E and graphs of responses to each scaled-opinion question can be found in Appendix F.

Figure 4.



Twenty-seven of the 28 respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement "Because we used public participation we are better able to make long-term planning decisions for the community." This finding indicates that public officials widely agree that public participation contributes to the community's ability to prepare for the future. Given the USDA's interest in promoting long-term development, this perception provides strong cause to encourage the use of public participation.

One short-term benefit of public participation is that citizens better understand the benefits and costs associated with government services. All 26 respondents either agree or strongly agree that "As a result of public participation, citizens now accept the real cost of providing new services." A supportive public is a crucial component of a successful project because it mitigates the potential for future conflict.

Figure 5.

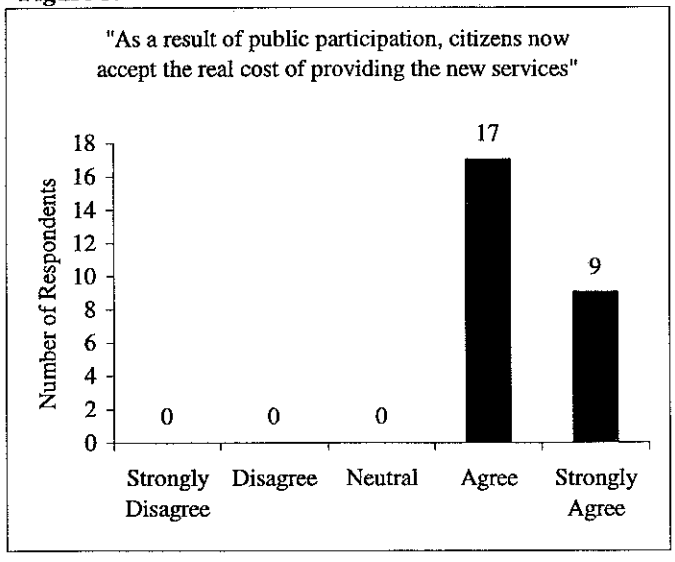
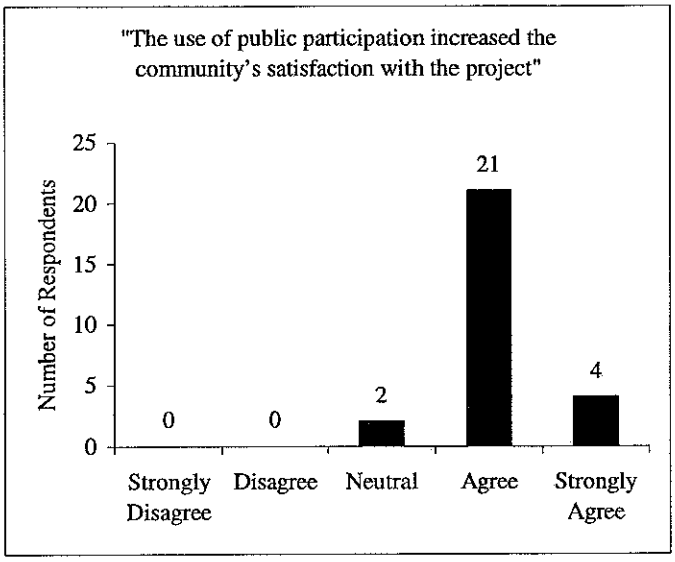


Figure 6.



Twenty-five of the 27 respondents agree or strongly agree that "The use of public participation increased the community's satisfaction with the project." It appears, then, that the community's level of satisfaction with the project process and finished system can be influenced through the use of public participation. Community leaders interested in minimal controversy—as well as reelection—will be highly interested in this finding.

There is general consensus among officials that public participation improves the ability of communities to compromise and to make more universally agreeable decisions. Twenty-six of the 27 respondents either strongly agree or agree that "Using public participation allowed a broader consensus to be formed within the community." Because public involvement mechanisms encourage all stakeholders to voice their concerns and generate alternatives, there is greater potential for options to surface that satisfy numerous interests. In addition, public participation provides a forum for education; a community that is informed of the real benefits and costs of a project is more likely to be supportive in the long term.

Figure 7.

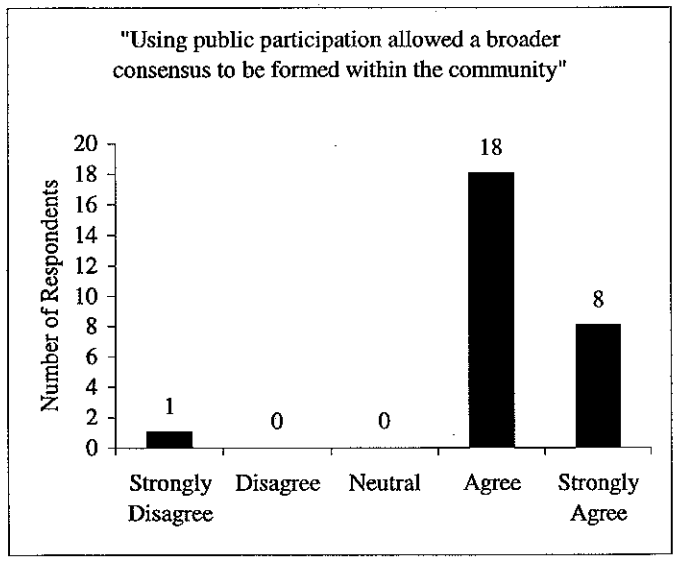
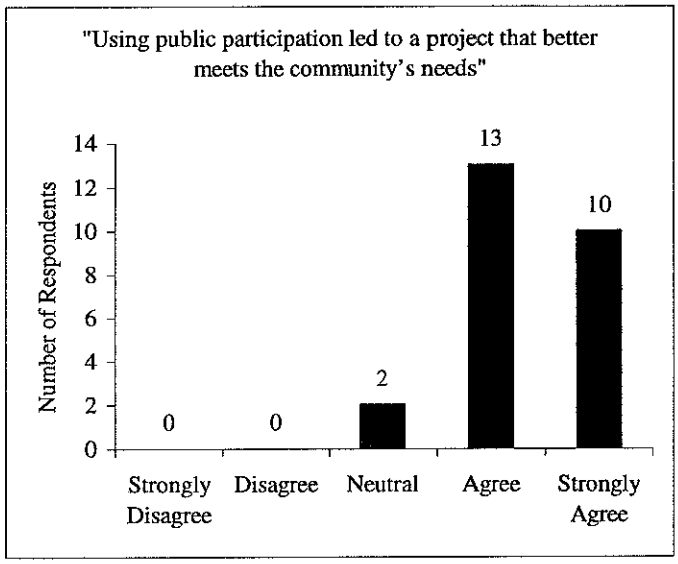


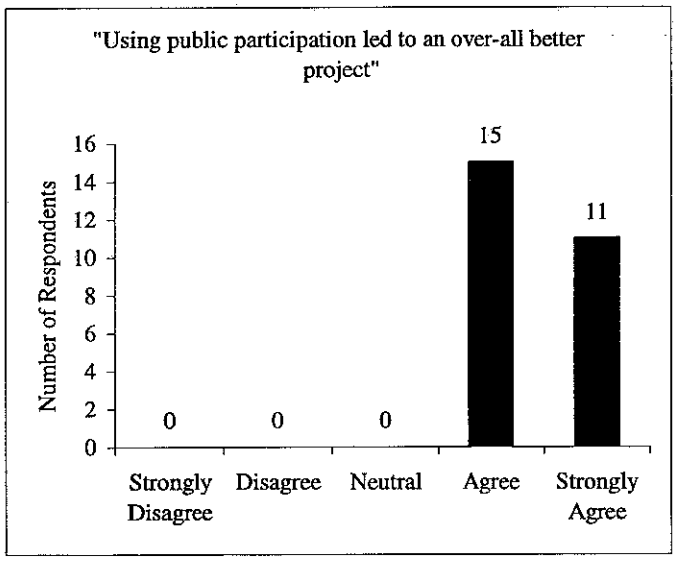
Figure 8.



Twenty-three of 25 respondents agree or strongly agree that "Using public participation led to a project that better meets the community's needs." Public participation plays a role in identifying community needs and thus allows community leaders to address those needs in the decision-making process.

The most significant perception noted by the Team is respondents' general sentiment about the value of public participation. There is strong agreement among public officials that public participation contributed positively to the quality of projects. All 26 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that "Using public participation led to an overall better project."

Figure 9.



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND TIME

Data regarding the length of the application process was available for 14 of the 31 town/village officials that were interviewed. On average, the application process (measured from the date of the submission of the Application for Federal Assistance to the date of the Request for Obligation of Funds) took 531 days, or one year, five months and 16 days. The shortest process length was three months and 14 days, and the longest was three years and 20 days. The second longest application process is also worthwhile to note: two years, seven months and 26 days.

The Team compared this data to the communities' public participation composite score (an index of how much public participation occurred) to identify whether any relationship exists. Of the eight towns/villages that scored above 100 on the public participation scale, five experienced a process length shorter than the average. Additionally, if the town with the longest process is removed from the data set, then the three communities with the lowest public participation scores also took the longest to move through the application process.

Table 1.

ID Number	Length	Length in Days	Public Participation Score
8	2 years, 7 months, 26 days	966	35.0
30	1 year, 11 months, 2 days	697	37.5
25	1 year, 11 months, 3 days	698	67.5

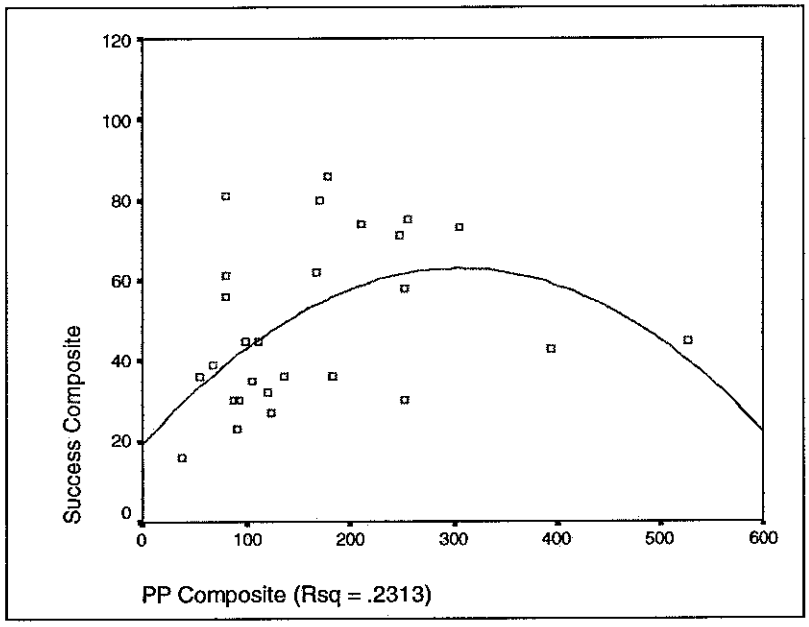
In general, however, there is no firm relationship between the length of the process and the amount of public participation used by a community. This finding can be explained in several ways. It is possible that public involvement, in fact, does not help communities diminish the length of the application process. Alternatively, the findings may have been different with a larger sample size. In addition, several other factors contribute to the length of the application process, including community interaction with other regulatory agencies. See Appendix G for the complete data set gathered from USDA administrative records.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Public Participation and Overall Success

To analyze findings quantitatively, the Team used SPSS to run a number of regression models. The Team began by comparing two items – the public participation composite score with the success composite score (how the respondents felt about the relationship between project success and public participation).

Figure 10. Public Participation and Perceptions of Success



As illustrated in Figure 6, initially, more public participation is associated with more positive perceptions of the contribution of public participation to project success. After a point, however, continuing to increase the amount of public participation actually appears to diminish its positive effect. Very large amounts of public participation thus seem to be detrimental to officials' perceptions of the usefulness of public participation.

The general trend appears to be that a moderate amount of public participation leads town leaders to believe that public participation is important to project success. The results of this regression model are statistically significant at conventional thresholds.

Public Participation and Community Support

In order to analyze the results in more detail, the Team broke the success composite score into more precise categories. The Team isolated those indicators of success that dealt only specifically with citizen acceptance of the project and the associated costs. Those indicators included the following questions from section three of the survey:

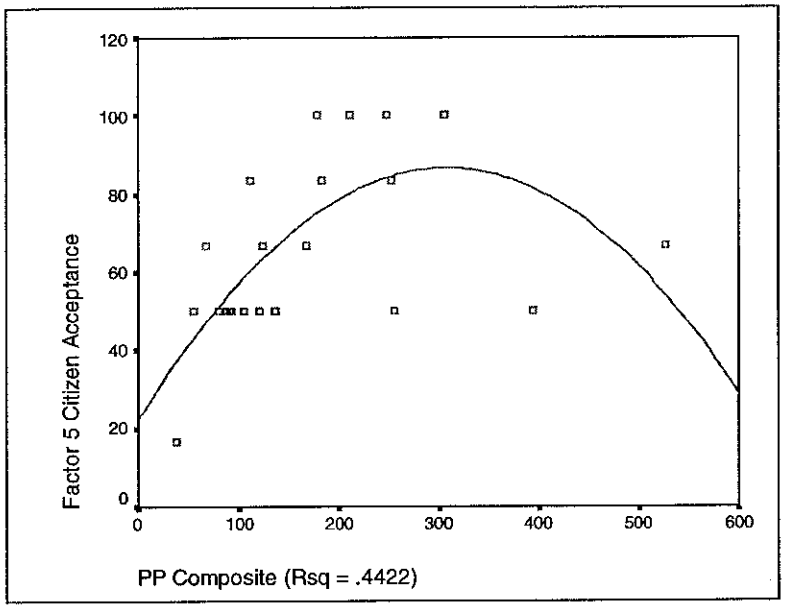
Q19 – Using public participation helped ensure that the new services are provided at a reasonable cost to the community.

Q20 – As a result of public participation, citizens now accept the real cost of providing the new services.

Q24 – The use of public participation increased the community's satisfaction with the decision-making process.

The results of these three questions were combined into a "citizen satisfaction" composite score and were compared to the public participation composite score, as displayed in Figure 7.

Figure 11. Public Participation and Citizen Acceptance



Although the results are similar to the comparison between general success and public participation, the curve is much steeper in this case. One possible interpretation is that using moderate amounts of public participation is perceived by community leaders to be quite helpful in achieving a high level of citizen approval and acceptance for a project. The curve slopes downward, however, after a point, which seems to indicate that projects that use a great deal of public participation do not necessarily benefit from increased citizen acceptance. The results of this regression model are very highly statistically significant.

A final result from the quantitative analysis deals with the use of a neutral facilitator to mediate roundtable discussions. Out of the 31 cases studied, 5 used a neutral facilitator to run at least one of the meetings. The team ran a regression comparing those 5 cases against those that did not use a facilitator. The results show a very strong (and highly statistically significant) relationship between the use of a facilitator and the response to survey item 23: "Because we used Public Participation, potential delays to the project were averted." Specifically, those communities that used a facilitator were much more likely to respond "agree" or "strongly agree" to this item. Table 2 illustrates the results.

Table 2.

"Because we used Public Participation, potential delays to the project were averted."		
Neutral Facilitator?	Yes	No
Strongly Agree	3	2
Agree	2	6
Neutral	-	7
Disagree	-	7
Strongly Disagree	-	-

The Team interprets the results to mean that communities that use neutral facilitators tend to believe that Public Participation is effective at avoiding delays to the project. A stronger interpretation of the data might suggest that communities are better able to avoid delays through the use of a neutral facilitator.

The precise details of all regression models explained above can be found in Appendix H.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

In the final section of the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to comment on their overall impressions about public participation and its role in the development of rural utility projects. The Team identified a number of common themes in the survey responses, which are reported in the following section. A complete compilation of all responses can be found in Appendices I and J.

What method of public participation was most useful in the decision-making process?

Public hearings and informational meetings are the most common method of public participation reported by officials; 22 out of 31 mayors or supervisors responded that this method was the most useful in the decision-making process. Public hearings are often legally required and are thus easily incorporated into the normal schedule of town/village board meetings. Respondents noted that public meetings were most valuable because they allow for direct communication between decision-makers and stakeholders.

Seven out of 31 respondents pointed to public petitions as a valuable method of public participation. Three town supervisors insisted that in the decision-making process, officials must be confident that they have community support. Hence, circulating a petition is a useful way to gauge community sentiment. An overwhelming majority signals decision-makers that they can move forward in the design and/or implementation of a project, while a narrow majority or substantial opposition indicates the need for changes to the project or further public involvement.

Finally, several respondents indicated that surveys were particularly useful in the decision-making process. The surveys included a wide range of issues for town planning and allowed decision-makers, using the information gathered from surveys, to incorporate a "big picture" perspective of a project into a town or villages planning process.

What benefits did public participation bring to the decision-making process and to the project in general?

The most often cited benefit of public participation was that it led to a better understanding of community needs. Eight community leaders reported that public participation allowed all interested parties to bring forth their views and concerns regarding the project. Open discussion of the problem helped to clarify the issues and ultimately address them. One respondent commented that "[public participation] allowed us to tailor the project to individual concerns." Public input also allowed decision-makers to address problems at earlier stages in the process.

Public petitions were a frequently mentioned response to this question, as well. This repetition of the value of petitions indicates that the mayors and supervisors strongly value petitions as a tool to validate their decisions and have confidence in their actions.

Six out of 31 officials noted that public participation helped educate the public about the need for water or wastewater improvements. Public involvement ensured that people realized the urgency of the problem and the need to invest in a utility project. A better understanding of the project also led to increased public support. One official asserted that public participation "keeps [the] community together instead of rumors going on." Two respondents further added that the community consensus that grew out of public participation allowed community governing boards to make more confident decisions.

Do you have any suggestions for municipalities currently going through this process regarding public participation?

Fourteen respondents offered the same suggestion to municipalities currently developing utility projects: involve and inform the public early and often. Community leaders noted the importance of engaging the public in discussion about the project early. Timely public participation was reported to be useful in speeding up the planning and development of utility projects.

Five respondents recommended that officials be prepared to answer questions quickly and accurately. In addition, using technical information to support answers, they noted, will prevent speculation, rumors, and distrust. As one official put it: "Be up front, answer questions quick but find the right answer—do not hedge."

Was information regarding the development of rural utility projects across NYS available to you?

Fifteen public officials reported that regional experts and agencies dealing with rural utility projects were their most common source of information regarding the development of rural utility projects. These included the USDA, the Environmental Finance Center at the Maxwell School and the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation. One respondent said that the workshops organized by Environmental Finance Center were key in pointing out the many opportunities that existed regarding rural utility projects.

Ten out of 31 respondents said that an important source of information were the associations and conferences that local government officials participate in, such as the NYS Conference of Mayors, the Association of Towns' Annual Meeting, and various workshops throughout NYS. These forums provide opportunity for community leaders to network and share knowledge and information regarding the development of utility projects. Additionally, eight respondents noted that the local engineering firm was an important source of information, relied on heavily by the community.

What can USDA do to improve public participation?

The need for a more simplified funding process was mentioned by six different officials. Many public officials in rural communities serve in their official capacity only part-time and have limited access to resources. A simpler process would assist them in understanding and meeting the various application requirements. Simplification of the process can be complemented with

standardized information about the process, contacts and timing (what one respondent called a "cook book"). Community leaders also expressed a desire for USDA to provide a forum for knowledge sharing and the exchange of relevant information.

In addition, three respondents noted the need for strengthening and deepening interaction with the USDA. Many respondents felt that one-on-one interaction with USDA officials was very valuable and helped them to maneuver through the process.

The USDA can ensure successful projects by helping communities understand the potential impact that water and wastewater projects have on the well-being and future development of a region. Two officials suggested that the USDA widely publicize examples of successful projects and the benefits that they yield. One respondent asserted that it is important for people to understand that water and wastewater projects are part of a "financial ecosystem"—that the improvement of the community infrastructure will make the community more attractive to business and new residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings reported above, the Team has compiled a number of recommendations for the USDA RUS. These recommendations are derived from the qualitative, quantitative and descriptive analyses mentioned above, as well as from the Team's general impressions after having interacted with the Client, the staff of the Environmental Finance Center and the mayors and supervisors of the communities studied. The Team has identified several major areas where public participation can be encouraged and enhanced.

PREPARING COMMUNITIES TO USE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Encourage public officials to approach their constituency with a concrete plan of action, but to be open to change. Having too little data or having too vague an idea of what to do seems to lead to confusion and unfruitful public meetings. On the other hand, insisting on staying with the exact initial plan creates frustration among the public and impedes the potential for "group think." Finding a balanced point between these extremes is important to create a solid foundation for the project. The Team recommends that the USDA encourage officials to have a solid proposal to start off the public participation process and then allow for changes.

Provide public officials with a "Public Participation Kit." Several officials indicated that they did not have a deep enough understanding of public participation methods to implement them effectively. The Team suggests that the Client provide a "kit" to community leaders that might include:

Sample surveys would include questions aimed at identifying community needs, such as water quality and usage. The sample might also include generic questions that help community leaders assess public support for a project.

Public participation guidelines would explain common methods of public involvement mechanisms and provide tips for appropriate and timely usage. Included in Appendix XXX is a sample timeline that includes public participation.

Educational materials are resources that officials can distribute to the public to raise awareness about the need for and potential benefits of water and wastewater projects. The USDA could also provide resources that explain the technical aspects of utility projects, as well as guidelines for citizen involvement in decision-making. Materials should be presented in layman's terms in a concise form.

PROVIDING NETWORKING AND MUTUAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Create a database to facilitate knowledge sharing among USDA customers. A top priority of the USDA is to build planning capacity among the municipalities that they fund. The design and implementation of utility projects, application for federal funding, the search for other funding sources, and the generation of community support are complex but necessary tasks.

While there is no standard formula for a successful water or wastewater project, community leaders can learn a great deal from each other's experiences. The Team recommends that the USDA create a database that includes examples of successful utility projects, contact information for members of the planning community (e.g., engineers, agency officials, and other public officials). While the database may not directly stimulate public participation, it will promote communication and information sharing among officials. The Team recognizes that this is a long-term project, but recommends that the USDA begin compiling information to include in a comprehensive database.

Encourage peer-to-peer exchanges between former and current USDA customers through agency-sponsored forums. The Team recognizes that the most effective information sharing and learning happens when officials are given the opportunity to share their experiences. The Team also recommends that the USDA invite representatives from regulatory agencies, grant-making organizations, engineers and consultants to ensure that community leaders have a complete picture of the process. Potential customers will have the opportunity to learn about the utility development process, the funding process and the use of public participation in the process.[9]

Encourage Timely Use of Public Participation

Encourage officials to educate and inform the public as early as possible and to gauge public support in the process before expending substantial funds. Respondents to the survey voiced frustration at having spent funds on planning and development early in the process, only to see public opposition to the project hindering the use of those initial investments. The Team thus recommends that the USDA advise community leaders to gauge community sentiment *before* committing significant funds.

Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Public Participation

Share the findings of this study with potential customers. Many of the findings of this study are consistent with the idea that public participation leads to project success. The strongest support for such a claim is that all of the respondents scored a positive value for their overall perception on whether or not public participation contributes to project success. The Client may use these findings as a motivating factor with potential customers to get them to think about the effectiveness of public participation methods.

[1] United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development, New York State Office. *USDA Rural Development: 2001 Progress Report.* See http://www.rurdev/usda.gov/ny.

[2] World Bank Participation Source Book

[3] Armour, A. (1995) The Citizens' Jury Model of Public Participation: A Critical Evaluation. In Fairness and Competence in Citizen Participation. O. Renn, T. Webler, and P. Wiedemann, eds. Kluwer AP: Boston, MA.

[4]Stiglitz, Joseph. Participation and Development: perspective from the comprehensive development paradigm. Review of Development Economics 6(2), 163-182, 2002).

[5] Beierle, T.C. and Crawford, J. (2001) Evaluating Dispute Resolution as an approach to Public Participation.

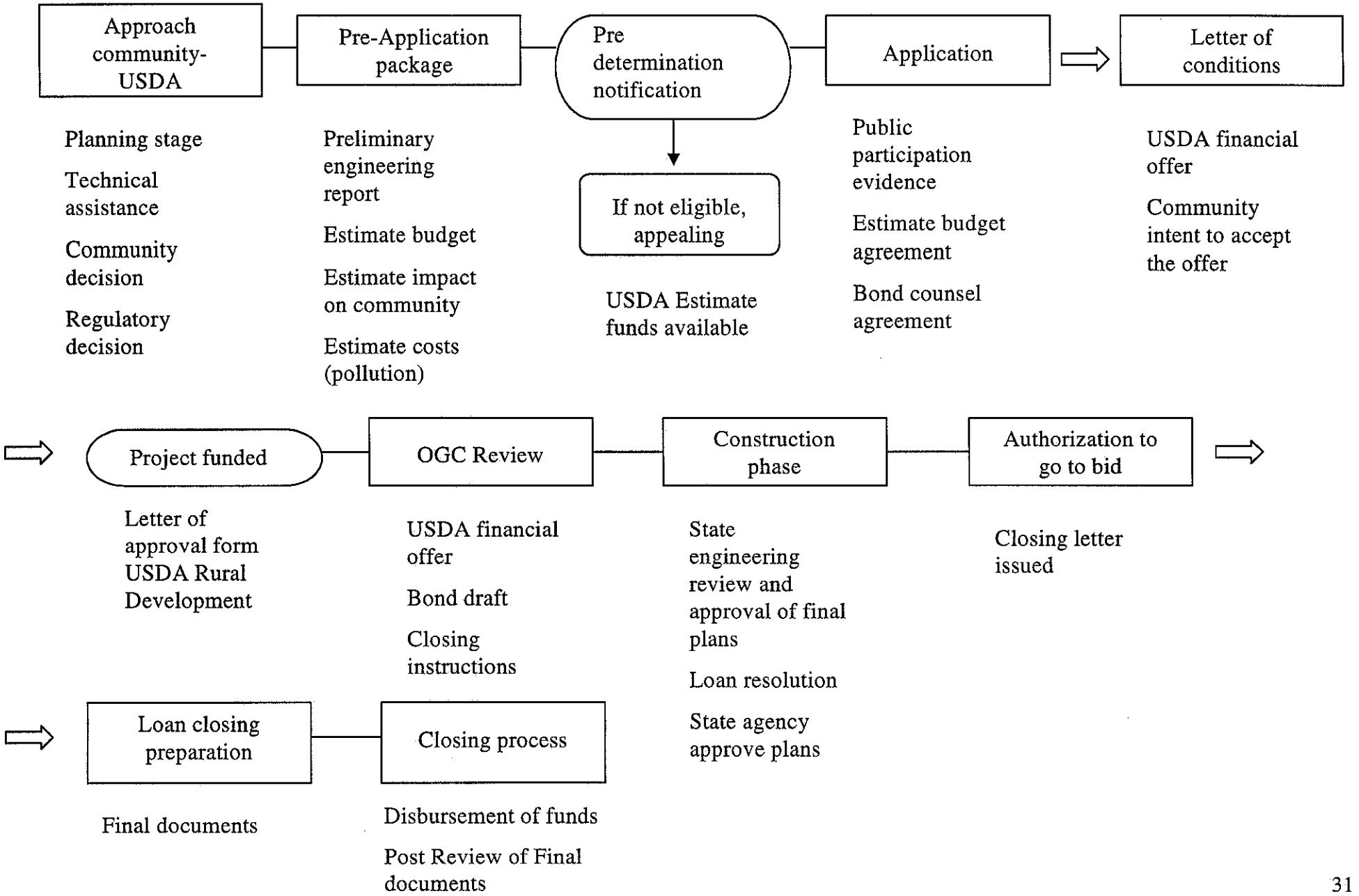
[6] Armour, A. (1995) The Citizens' Jury Model of Public Participation: A Critical Evaluation. In Fairness and Competence in Citizen Participation. O. Renn, T. Webler, and P. Wiedemann, eds. Kluwer AP: Boston, MA.

[7] During the weeks of May 12th and May 19th, while the survey was being drafted, the Team contacted over half of the community officials from the original list to set up interviews between May 21st and 27th to ensure the highest possible response rate. The time allotted for survey implementation was extended upon receipt of the expanded list. The additional people were contacted and asked for interviews immediately.

[8] In two cases where this document was unavailable, a Request for Pre-Eligibility Determination was located and used in its stead.

[9] The *Metropolitan Capacity Building Program*, administered by the Federal Transit Administration, is a useful model for a program that attempts to build planning capacity and facilitate information sharing among agency customer. See http://www.mcb.fhwa.dot.gov/ .

USDA Rural Utilities Project Funding Process



APPENDIX B

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Survey ID _____

Hi, my name is _____ from Maxwell School of Syracuse University. Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this interview. As we talked about earlier, the USDA is interested in understanding how different forms of Public Participation are used in the development of rural utility projects. Before we begin, I just wanted to assure you that all responses that you give will remain strictly confidential. If, at any time, certain terms I use are unclear please don't hesitate to stop me and I will be glad to clarify. Just as a reminder, this interview will take approximately 25 minutes.

I. Opening questions

1. Did your project involve water systems, wastewater systems, or both?

2. Was the project initiated by a mandate from a regulatory agency, a public petition, an official initiative, or some other source?

3. Did the project pass a referendum?

4. When did the system(s) become operational?

5. In your opinion, was the project very controversial, somewhat controversial, hardly controversial, or not at all controversial?

II. Public Participation Methods

The next series of questions involve various types of public participation methods. I will give a brief description of each method before proceeding.

PUBLIC HEARING / COMMENT PERIOD QUESTIONS

The first method that we are going to talk about is public hearing, which is a formal meeting where officials can provide information about the project and receive feedback from the community members present.

6. How many public hearings were held in connection with the project?

If yes, go to Question 7. If no, go to Question 9.

7. Were records of the hearings made available to the public? Yes No

8. At what stage(s) in the project were the hearings conducted?

Circle all that apply: prior to applying for USDA funds during application after approval

ROUNDTABLE / FOCUS GROUP

The next methods I'd like to ask you about are roundtables and focus groups. By **roundtable** I mean an invitation-only group, usually 25-50 members, with diverse viewpoints, convened to discuss issues related to the project. By **focus group,** I mean an invitation-only group, usually 8-10 members, all sharing similar views on the project, convened to discuss issues related to the project.

9. How many roundtables and/or focus groups were held? (*If respondent cannot identify meeting as a RT or FG, ask them:* Who? Why? Was it opened to the public)

If yes, go to Question 10. If no, go to Question 13.

10. Was there ever a neutral facilitator? Yes No

11. Were records of the roundtable and/or focus group made available to the public? Yes No

12. At what stage(s) in the project were the roundtable and/or the focus group conducted?

Circle all that apply: prior to application during application after approval

WRITTEN AND BROADCAST MESSAGES

13. Finally, how many times was an official message published in regard to the project?

If yes, go to Question 14. If no, go to Question 15.

14. At what stage(s) in the project were these messages published?

Circle all that apply: prior to application during application after approval

CATCH ALL

15. Other than the methods I have mentioned, did you solicit the public for comments or feedback using any other methods? For example surveys, key interviews, and so on?

If yes, go to Question 16. If no, go to Question 17.

16. At what stage(s) in the project was(were) this(these) method(s) conducted?

Circle all that apply: prior to application during application after approval

III. Perception

In the next section, I'm going to read a number of statements. Please respond to these statements with the following choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree or Strongly Agree. If you feel that the statement does not apply to your project, please respond "Not Applicable."

Development and Long-Term Planning

17. Using PP led to a project that makes our community more attractive to business investment:

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

18. Because we used PP, we are better able to make long-term planning decisions for the community:

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

Cost

19. Using PP helped ensure that the new services are provided at a reasonable cost to the community:

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

20. As a result of PP, citizens now accept the real cost of providing the new services:

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

Timeliness

21. Using PP increased the length of the planning stage.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

22. Using PP increased the length of the entire process.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

23. Because we used PP, potential delays to the project were averted.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

Satisfaction

24. The use of PP increased the community's satisfaction with the decision-making process.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

25. The use of PP increased the community's satisfaction with the project.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

26. The use of PP increased my satisfaction with the project.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

Education

27. Because we used PP, the community was well informed about the project.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

28. Using PP helped the community understand the technical details of the project.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

Depth and Buy-In

29. Using PP allowed a broader consensus to be formed within the community.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

30. Using PP increased citizen resentment and resistance to the project.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

31. As a result of PP, a greater number of interested parties were involved in the process.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

Feedback

32. As a result of PP, additional relevant issues were uncovered.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

33. As a result of PP, relevant issues were discovered earlier on in the process.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

Partnerships

34. During the process, we learned from neighboring communities.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

35. Using PP helped us partner with neighboring communities on projects.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

General

36. Using PP led to a project that better meets the community's needs.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

37. Using PP helped me make a better decision about the project.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

38. The use of PP resulted in modifications to the original plan.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

39. Using PP lead to an over-all better project.

Str. Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Str. Agree N/A

IV. Ending questions

I have a few open-ended questions which are meant to solicit your opinion on the use of public participation. Please feel free to respond with as much or as little information as you feel comfortable with.

40. What method of public participation was most useful in the decision-making process?

41. What benefits did public participation bring to the decision-making process and to the project in general?

42. Do you have any suggestions for municipalities currently going through this process regarding public participation?

43. Was information regarding the development of rural utility projects across NYS available to you?

44. Would this type of information be helpful in the process?

45. What can USDA do to improve public participation?

APPENDIX C

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION COMPOSITE SCORE

The Team assigned a point value to each type of public input (roundtable, hearing, etc.). The score for a single project is arrived at by multiplying the number of times each type if input is used by its point value. To this is added additional points if records of that input were made available to the public, if a neutral facilitator was present during the process and if the input occurred before, during and after the USDA application process. The exact details of scoring are captured in a table on the following page.

An example is shown below of a hypothetical project and its Public Participation Composite Score.

Project "A" used two roundtables with a neutral facilitator present and four public hearings where records were made available to the public. Therefore the project's Public Participation score is:

Input type	Point Value	# Used	Sub-total
Roundtable	30	2	60
Public Hearing	10	4	40
Additional Points			
Neutral Facilitator	30		30
Records available to public	10		10
Project "A" Total			140

Table of scoring system used for Public Participation.

	Point Value	Records		When		Facilitator	
# of Public Hearings	× 10	Yes	×1.25 points	Prior	+ 20 points		
		No	×1.00 points	During	+ 10 points		
		Sometimes	×1.10 points	After	+ 5 points		
# of Round Table / Focus Groups	(+ 50) × 15	Yes	×1.25 points	Prior	+ 20 points	Yes	+30 points
		No	×1.00 points	During	+ 10 points	No	+ 0 points
		Sometimes	×1.10 points	After	+ 5 points		
# of Official Messages	× 5 points			Prior	+ 10 points		
				During	+ 10 points		
				After	+ 10 points		

APPENDIX D

PROJECT SUCCESS COMPOSITE SCORE

In the survey, certain questions were asked to gauge how the respondent perceived the effects of Public Participation on different elements of project success. The score for "Project Success" is arrived the following way:

Response Points	
Strongly Agree	2
Agree	1
Neutral	0
Disagree	-1
Strongly Disagree	-2
Not Applicable	-

Each response was given a point value between negative two and positive 2. The responses were totaled into a composite score and made into a percentage-point scale. Project Success composite scores can range from negative 100 points to positive 100 points. A project that received 100 points could be interpreted to mean that Public Participation was perceived by the mayor to be essential to project success. Negative 100 points could be interpreted to mean that Public Participation was perceived to be detrimental to project success.

APPENDIX E

SURVEY RESPONSE TALLIES

II. Opening questions

15. Did your project involve water systems, wastewater systems, or both? **(n=31)**
    - **15 water systems**
    - **13 wastewater systems**
    - **3 both water and wastewater systems**

16. Was the project initiated by a mandate from a regulatory agency, a public petition, an official initiative, or some other source? **(n=31)**
    - **6 mandate from a regulatory agency**
    - **15 public petition**
    - **8 official initiative**
    - **2 some other source**

17. Did the project pass a referendum? **(n=31)**
    - **15 yes**
    - **16 no**

18. When did the system(s) become operational? **(n=31)**
    - **18 systems are operational (as of June 1, 2003)**
    - **13 are not yet operational (as of June 1, 2003)**

19. In your opinion, was the project very controversial, somewhat controversial, hardly controversial, or not at all controversial? **(n=31)**
    - **1 very controversial**
    - **6 somewhat controversial**
    - **8 hardly controversial**
    - **16 not at all controversial**

III. Public Participation Methods

20. How many public hearings were held in connection with the project? **(n=30)**
    - **Mean= 3.33**
    - **Min= 0**
    - **Max= 12**

21. Were records of the hearings made available to the public? **(n=31)**
    - **31 Yes**
    - **0 No**

22. At what stage(s) in the project were the hearings conducted?

23 **prior to application**
15 **during application**
11 **after approval**

23. How many roundtables and/or focus groups were held?
n=31
Mean= 1.26
Min= 0 (19 held 0)
Max= 9

24. Was there ever a neutral facilitator? **(n=12)**
5 **Yes**
7 **No**

25. Were records of the roundtable and/or focus group made available to the public?
10 **Yes**
1 **No**
20 **N/A**

26. At what stage(s) in the project were the roundtable and/or the focus group conducted?
(n=12)
7 **prior to application**
6 **during application**
3 **after approval**

27. Finally, how many times was an official message published in regard to the project?
n=31
Mean= 4.84
Min= 1
Max= 12

28. At what stage(s) in the project were these messages published?
22 **prior to application**
22 **during application**
14 **after approval**

III. Perception

17. Using PP led to a project that makes our community more attractive to business investment:

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**3**	**13**	**10**	**5**

18. Because we used PP, we are better able to make long-term planning decisions for the community:

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**1**	**12**	**15**	**3**

19. Using PP helped ensure that the new services are provided at a reasonable cost to the community:

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**2**	**12**	**10**	**7**

20. As a result of PP, citizens now accept the real cost of providing the new services:

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**0**	**17**	**9**	**5**

21. Using PP increased the length of the planning stage.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
1	**16**	**1**	**8**	**1**	**4**

22. Using PP increased the length of the entire process.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**18**	**0**	**9**	**0**	**4**

23. Because we used PP, potential delays to the project were averted.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**7**	**7**	**8**	**5**	**4**

24. The use of PP increased the community's satisfaction with the decision-making process.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**2**	**17**	**9**	**3**

25. The use of PP increased the community's satisfaction with the project.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**2**	**21**	**4**	**4**

26. The use of PP increased my satisfaction with the project.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**1**	**2**	**13**	**12**	**3**

27. Because we used PP, the community was well informed about the project.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**1**	**20**	**8**	**2**

28. Using PP helped the community understand the technical details of the project.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**5**	**3**	**15**	**4**	**4**

29. Using PP allowed a broader consensus to be formed within the community.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
1	**0**	**0**	**18**	**8**	**4**

30. Using PP increased citizen resentment and resistance to the project.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
6	**18**	**0**	**3**	**0**	**4**

31. As a result of PP, a greater number of interested parties were involved in the process.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**4**	**3**	**15**	**4**	**5**

32. As a result of PP, additional relevant issues were uncovered.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**6**	**4**	**15**	**1**	**5**

33. As a result of PP, relevant issues were discovered earlier on in the process.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**8**	**4**	**11**	**2**	**6**

34. During the process, we learned from neighboring communities.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**6**	**1**	**10**	**7**	**7**

35. Using PP helped us partner with neighboring communities on projects.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**5**	**0**	**11**	**4**	**11**

36. Using PP led to a project that better meets the community's needs.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**2**	**13**	**10**	**6**

37. Using PP helped me make a better decision about the project.

Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**2**	**0**	**15**	**9**	**5**

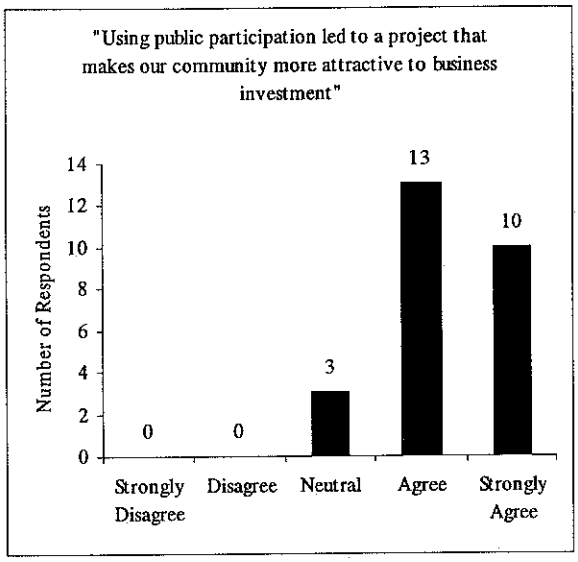
38. The use of PP resulted in modifications to the original plan.

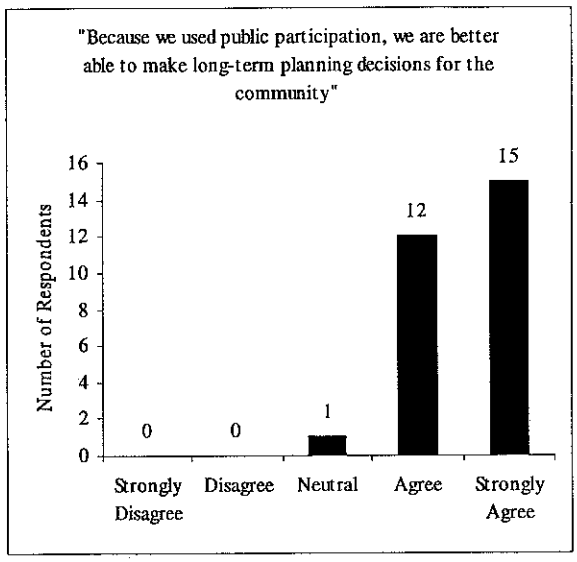
Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**8**	**1**	**10**	**4**	**8**

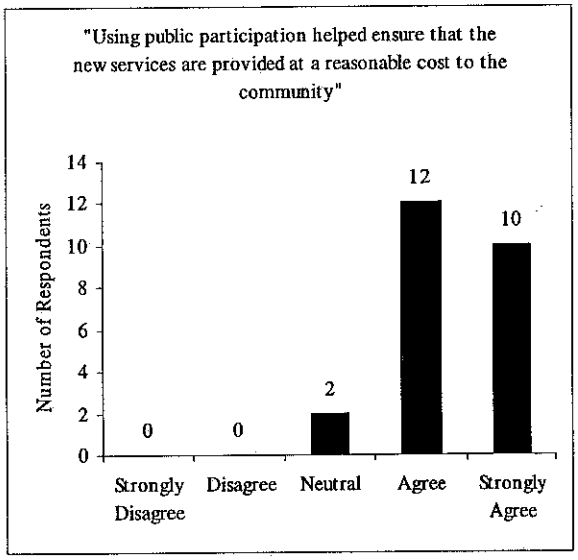
39. Using PP lead to an over-all better project.

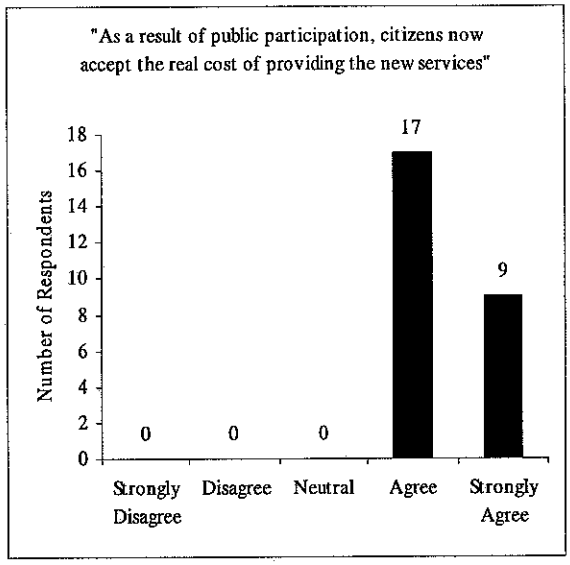
Str. Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Str. Agree	N/A
0	**0**	**0**	**15**	**11**	**5**

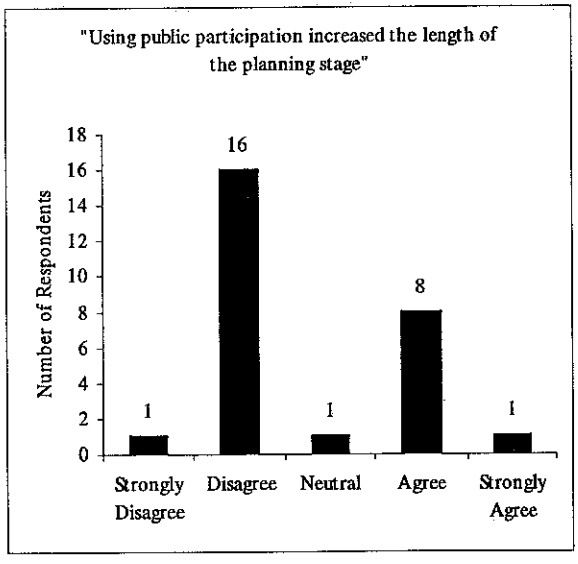
APPENDIX F

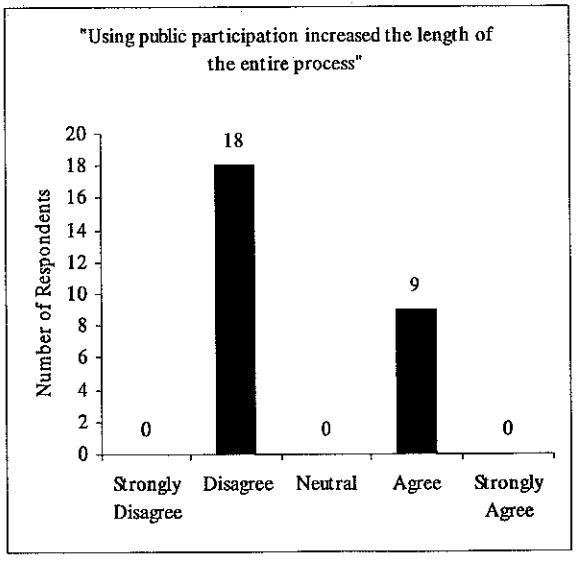

"Using public participation led to a project that makes our community more attractive to business investment"
Number of Respondents
0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14
0 0 3 13 10
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

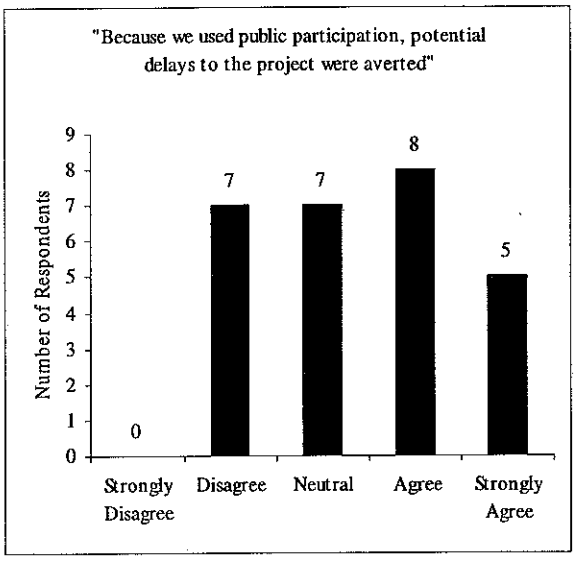

"Because we used public participation, we are better able to make long-term planning decisions for the community"
Number of Respondents
0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16
0 0 1 12 15
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

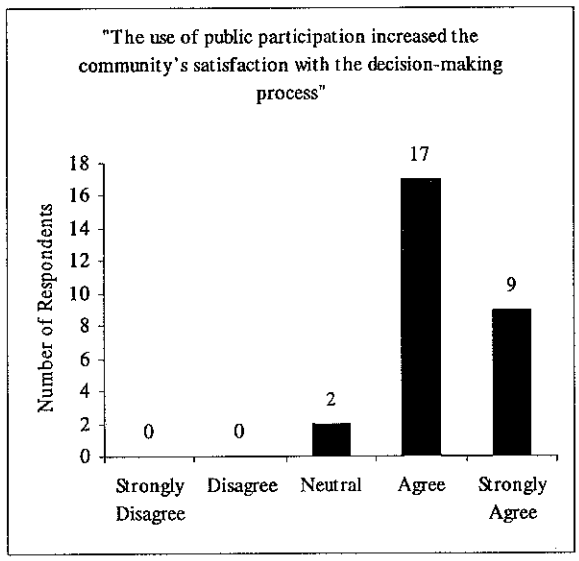

"Using public participation helped ensure that the new services are provided at a reasonable cost to the community"
Number of Respondents
0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14
0 0 2 12 10
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

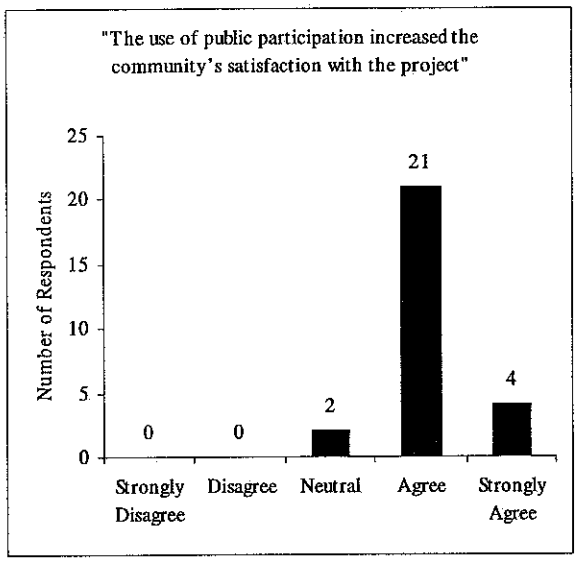

"As a result of public participation, citizens now accept the real cost of providing the new services"
Number of Respondents
0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18
0 0 0 17 9
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

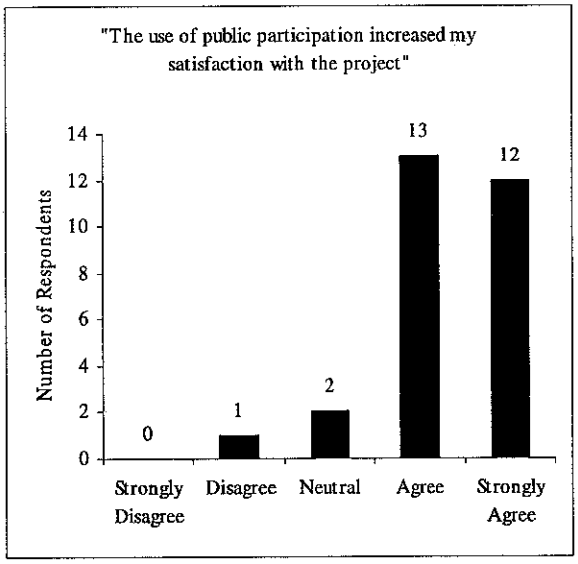

"Using public participation increased the length of the planning stage"
Number of Respondents
0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18
1 16 1 8 1
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

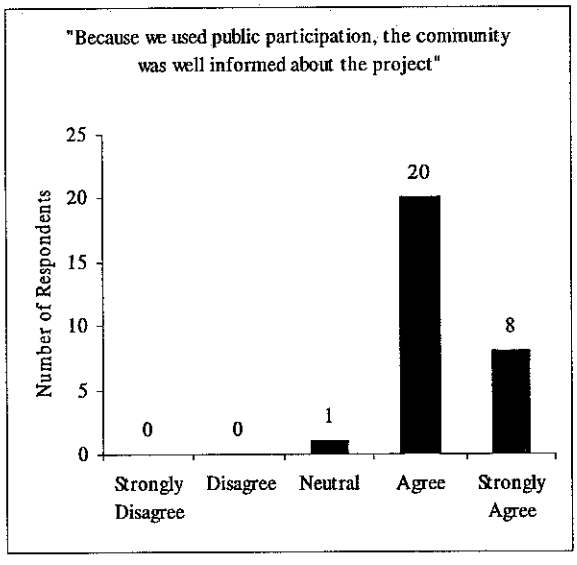

"Using public participation increased the length of the entire process"
Number of Respondents
0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20
0 18 0 9 0
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

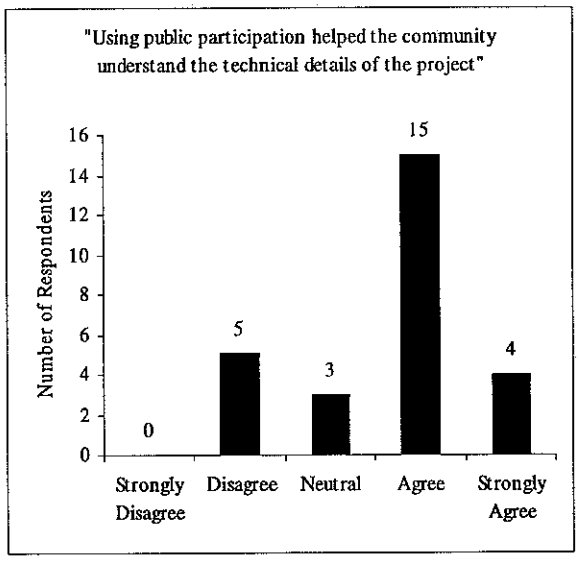

"Because we used public participation, potential delays to the project were averted"
Number of Respondents
0
7
7
8
5
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

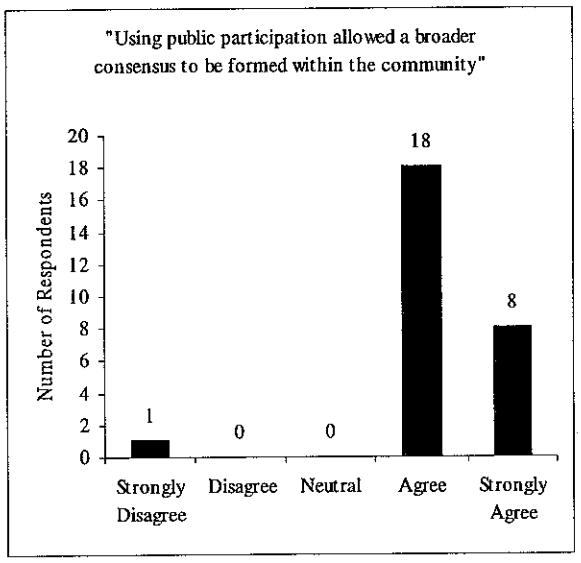

"The use of public participation increased the community's satisfaction with the decision-making process"
Number of Respondents
0
0
2
17
9
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

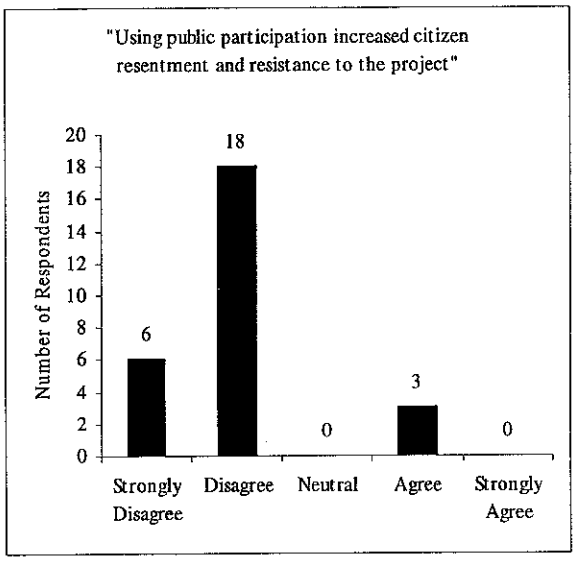

"The use of public participation increased the community's satisfaction with the project"
Number of Respondents
0
0
2
21
4
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

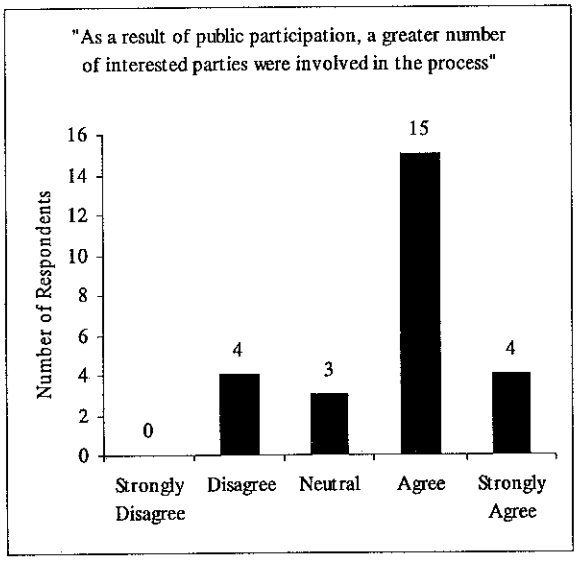

"The use of public participation increased my satisfaction with the project"
Number of Respondents
0
1
2
13
12
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

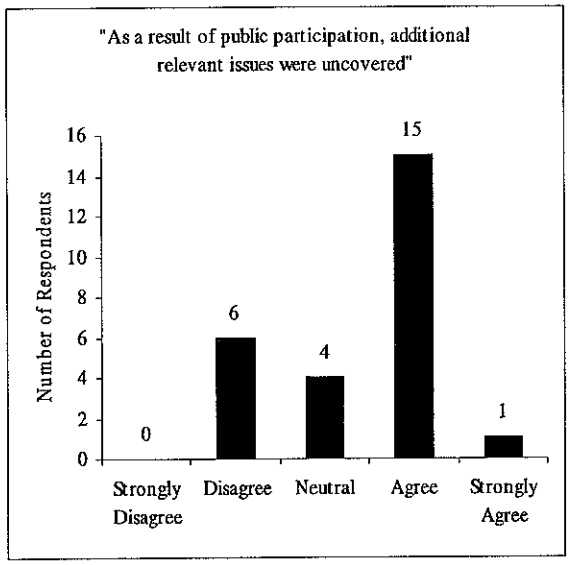

"Because we used public participation, the community was well informed about the project"
Number of Respondents
0
0
1
20
8
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

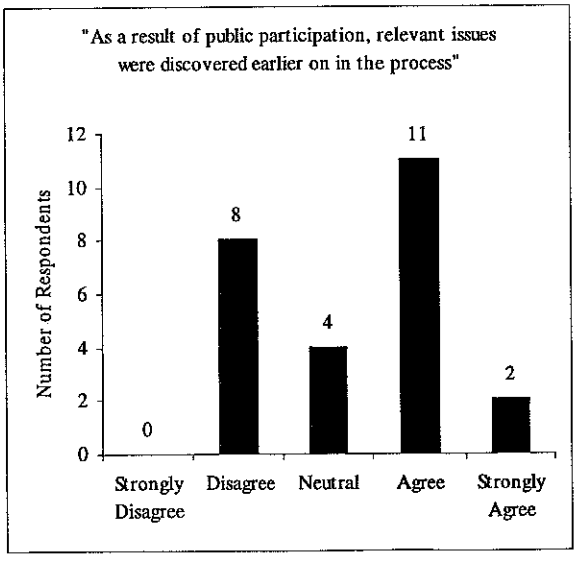

"Using public participation helped the community understand the technical details of the project"
Number of Respondents
0
5
3
15
4
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

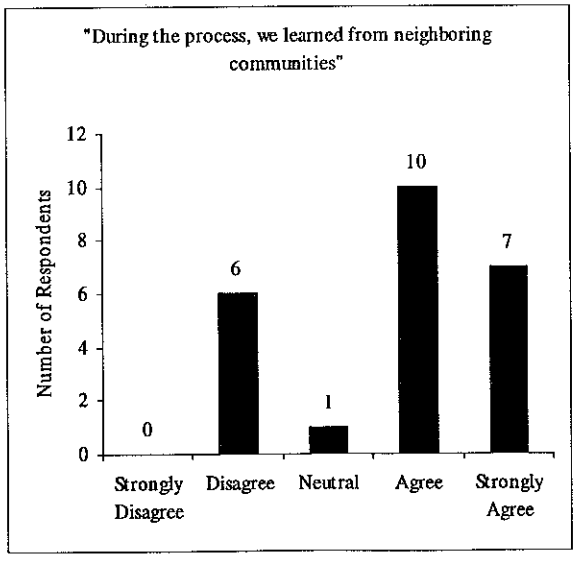

"Using public participation allowed a broader consensus to be formed within the community"
Number of Respondents
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
1
0
0
18
8
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

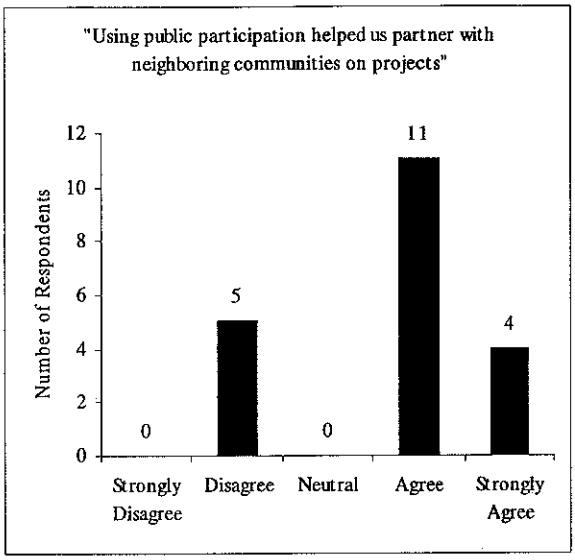

"Using public participation increased citizen resentment and resistance to the project"
Number of Respondents
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
6
18
0
3
0
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

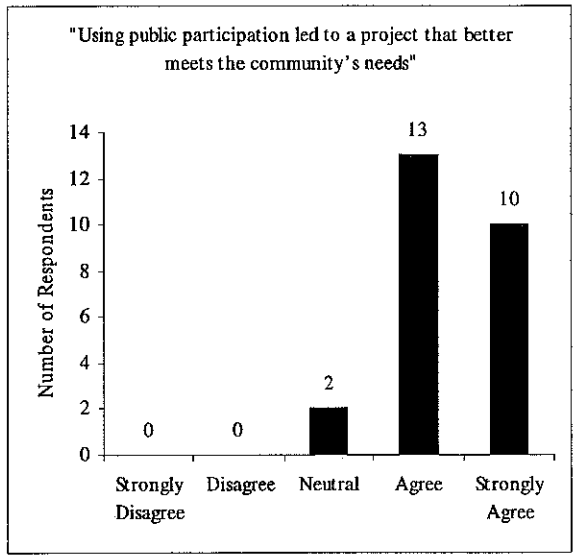

"As a result of public participation, a greater number of interested parties were involved in the process"
Number of Respondents
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
0
4
3
15
4
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

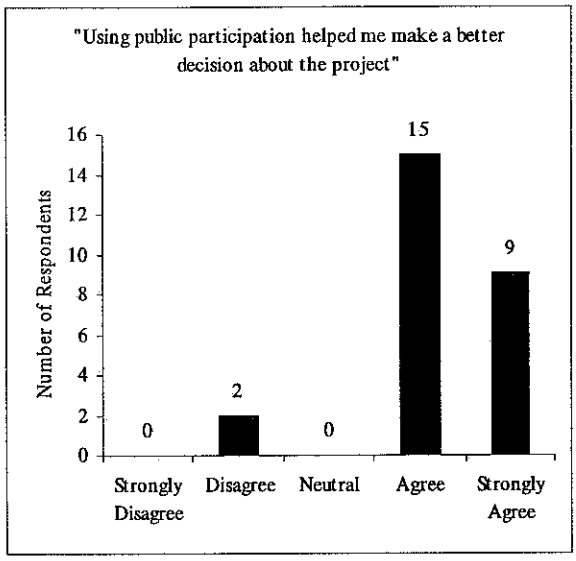

"As a result of public participation, additional relevant issues were uncovered"
Number of Respondents
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
0
6
4
15
1
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

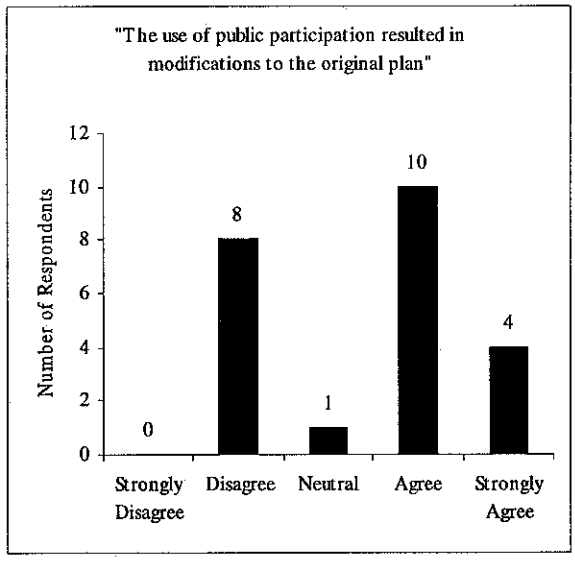

"As a result of public participation, relevant issues were discovered earlier on in the process"
Number of Respondents
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
0
8
4
11
2
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

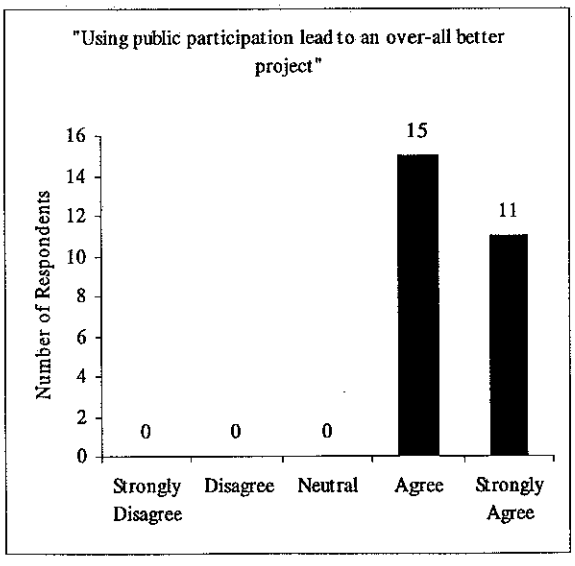

"During the process, we learned from neighboring communities"
Number of Respondents
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
0
6
1
10
7
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree


"Using public participation helped us partner with neighboring communities on projects"
Number of Respondents
0
5
0
11
4
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree


"Using public participation led to a project that better meets the community's needs"
Number of Respondents
0
0
2
13
10
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree


"Using public participation helped me make a better decision about the project"
Number of Respondents
0
2
0
15
9
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree


"The use of public participation resulted in modifications to the original plan"
Number of Respondents
0
8
1
10
4
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree


"Using public participation lead to an over-all better project"
Number of Respondents
0
0
0
15
11
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

APPENDIX G

USDA ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Length of Application Process and Ability to Secure Non-USDA Funding

ID Number	Co-Funding	Length	Days
8	yes	2 yrs, 7 mo, 26 days	966
30	no	1 yr, 11 mo, 2 days	697
25	no	1 yr, 11 mo, 3 days	698
22	no	1 yr, 2 mo	425
11	no	1 yr, 4 mo, 3 days	488
11	no	1 yr, 1 mo, 18 days	413
29	no	3 yrs, 20 days	1115
13	yes	7 mo	210
27	yes	1 yr, 11 mo, 12 days	707
31	no	3 mo, 14 days	104
2	applied - maybe	1 yr, 5 days	370
6	yes	1 yr, 10 mo, 17 days	682
18	no	11 mo, 25 days	355
1	yes	1 yr, 6 mo, 2 days	547
23	no	6 mo, 13 days	193
Average		1 yr, 5 mo, 16 days	531

APPENDIX H

REGRESSION MODELS

Regression - All Categories of Success

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.481[a]	.231	.170	18.5039

a. Predictors: (Constant), Squared PP Composite, PP Composite

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	19.364	11.149		1.737	.095
	PP Composite	.286	.110	1.560	2.606	.015
	Squared PP Composite	-.000469	.000	-1.341	-2.242	.034

a. Dependent Variable: Success Composite

Regression - Citizen Acceptance

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.665[a]	.442	.384	17.5612

a. Predictors: (Constant), Squared PP Composite, PP Composite

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	22.482	11.632		1.933	.068
	PP Composite	.416	.112	2.228	3.710	.001
	Squared PP Composite	-.00068	.000	-1.940	-3.230	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Factor 5 Citizen Acceptance

Regression – Question 23

Q23 - Because we used PP, potential delays to the project were averted.

Str. Disagree:	-2
Disagree:	-1
Neutral:	0
Agree:	1
Str. Agree:	2
N/A:	Not applicable

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.535[a]	.286	.257	.93

a. Predictors: (Constant), Facilitator Dummy

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.136	.199		.685	.500
	Facilitator Dummy	1.464	.463	.535	3.164	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Q23

APPENDIX I

TALLIED RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The first number after listing is the number of times that response was given.
The numbers in brackets is the survey ID number the response can be found on.

Question 40: What method of public participation was most useful in the decision-making process?

1. Public / Informational hearings 22
1. [1,2,3,6,7,10,12,13,14,16,17,18,19,21,22,23,24,27,28,29,30,31]
2. Petitions 7 [2,3,10,14,25,29,31]
3. One on one meeting. 4 [2,3,7,29]
4. Round Table / Focus Group 3 [4,24,31]
5. Have good technical information 3 [17,21,22]
6. Survey 3 [5,11,24]
7. Casual dress – no suits 1 [23]
8. newspaper 1 [7]
9. Coordination between/with local groups and orgs. 1 [20]
10. informational letters 1 [31]

Question 41: What benefits did public participation bring to the decision-making process and to the project in general?

1. Get a better perspective of community needs. 8 [1,2,11,18,20,24,29]
2. Community understood W/WW project better, the fact that it was a common problem
1. Not an individual problem and that it was time to address problem. 6
2. [3,5,16,19,27,31]
3. Discover other issues and make changes. 4 [2,12,13,17] 4. Easier more confident
4. decision for Board when there is a clear majority (project
5. Acceptable to community). 2 [10,16]
6. More consensus. 2 [22,30]
7. Discover public misunderstandings early – diffuse misinformation. 1 [4]
8. 7. More openness 1 [7]
9. 8. Best project for Best Price 1 [7]
10. Higher community involvement in process 1 [7]
11. Inter-Community partnerships 1 [28]

Question 42: Do you have any suggestions for municipalities currently going through this process regarding public participation?

1. Involve/ inform public (early on) and often. 14
   [1,2,7,12,16,18,19,20,21,27,28,29,30,31]
2. Petition before significant spending or effort 4 [3,10,17,25]
3. Do not inform until you have technical information. 3 [1,18,24]

4. Case specific 2 [26,27]
5. Answer questions well and quickly 2 [14,23]
6. Third party important as trustful mediator between public and officials 1 [4]
7. Research to get good advisors (engineer, lawyer, finance) 1 [14]
8. Do not depend on public meetings to spread information, eg. send letters 1 [18]
9. Advertise meeting well. 1 [13]
10. Ask for technical assistance early on to stay on track 1 [2]
11. PMFP conferences with tech. Assistance and other communities 1 [5]
12. Keep lines of communication open 1 [6]
13. Implement an exhaustive initial survey 1 [11]
14. Multiple meetings. 1 [13]

Question 43: Was information regarding the development of rural utility projects across NYS available to you?

1. Regional experts/agencies. 15 { Maxwell [3,19,27,28], Cornell, [14], PMFP [5], EFC[11,12,28], Northeast AR Corporation[5], USDA[3,27,28], Rural Development [7,11,29], Regional experts [17], DANC [16] 2. Elected government officials network. 10 { Neighboring towns[14,17,21,24,28], NYS conference of Mayors[30], Association of towns annual meeting (in Feb. in NYC) [20], NYS workshop[14], Tug Hill Commission [16] }
3. Local engineer 8 [3,6,7,8,9,18,25,31]
4. Grant writer 1 [7]
5. Mailings 1 [26]
6. Publications 1 [27]

Question 44: Would this type of information be helpful in the process?

1. Yes 22 [3,4,5,6,7,11,13,14,16,17,18,20,21,22,23,24,26,27,28,29,30,31]
2. No 12 [1,2,8,9,10,15,19,25]
3. Neutral 1 [12]

Question 45: What can USDA do to improve public participation?

1. Standardize – roadmap – simplify, project process. 6 [4,5,11,20,31]
2. USDA – frequent contact. 3 [5,12,14]
3. Showcase / advetise what other communities have done, show potential of W/WW. 2 [13,30]
4. Simple lists/ contacts/database of who is doing/done what. 2 [2,19]
5. Neutral Roundtable good. 1 [1]
6. Get petition done first 1 [3]
7. Madatory use of layman's terms and acronyms for project and process. 1 [4]
8. Show more options (what if you don't get funding) 1 [4]
9. USDA – should mandate Public Particiapation 1 [30]
10. Love to make promises they cannot live up to 1 [7]
11. Have a guideline survey for communities to follow 1 [11]

APPENDIX J

COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

40. What method of public participation was most useful in the decision-making process?

- public hearing
- a combination of - meetings open to public, person to person interaction (between and among citizens and public officials), community petitions for projects
- informational meeting, public hearing, one on one for easement (he went door to door)
- Roundtable Focus Group
- Initial survey gauging the need and approval (acceptance of cost) among citizens regarding the project. Without it would not have gone ahead with the project.
- informational meeting- in theory a lot of feedback, also worked in practice.
- public hearings, having the newspaper inform all residents. Here, meetings are always open, small areas people know each other (people can and do call me at home) and share openly and freely.
- no
- NA
- petitions, public meeting
- survey, gave a clear understanding of how many people had water problems and what kind.
- public hearings- give and take, people can ask questions and get feedback. Everyone in community attended All 5 meetings.
- public hearing
- info meeting prior to public hearing
- NA
- community forum (public meeting). Official said that those most interested would participate in process anyways, had to make sure that there was increased participation by all of community in the public meeting.
- public meetings, technical experts at meetings
- scheduled meetings specifically for project
- public meeting to explain why project (why concern). Explain to people what problem is first, also let them know what impact will be ($, long term). Then opened up and provided opportunity for input. People are suspect when government comes and tells this is "what we are going to do at this cost".
- coordinating with local groups and organizations (chamber of commerce)
- announce public hearings, have dedicated meetings Have experts, drawings, and such to make it easy to understand.
- information meeting, technical experts present
- public hearing information meeting. * decision makers wore casual dress.
- info meetings, RT, used surveys. Because did not know where plans would go
- petition and referendum
- don't know
- open meeting
- the public hearings
- The phone calls and general outcry of the poor state of water highlighted the need for a water project. People first called and asked what were chances of getting water. People also knew that

the lack of a water system lowered the value of their properties. Also, because of the feedback that was received through public hearings, phone calls and speaking with residents individually, it was decided that it would be more financially feasible to get water from a neighboring town rather than building a water system of our own.
- input positive
- all of the above

41. What benefits did public participation bring to the decision-making process and to the project in general?
- better perspective on community needs
- brought numerous and varied aspects and sides to process
- understand that they had severer problem and how big the problem; even those with good water now know how many do not have good water and that those with good water will soon have contaminated wells Big, community problem not individual.
- we discovered misunderstandings of public, by holding meetings you can diffuse
- PP highlighted the fact that there was a unified concern and need for better service (need for water line).
- "it allowed us to tailor the project to individual concerns"
- meetings open for everyone. More, openness. PP made sure everything in open (nothing illegal). PP ensures that the best project is chosen for the best price. Having PP made sure that the whole town was involved in process.
- no
- NA
- easier for board to decide when there is a majority
- elected officials are responsible to deal with what public deems most important, survey and referendum made the public's concerns very clear.
- clarified issues, able to address issues by having the public hearings
- NA
- gave village board confirmation that project was acceptable to community despite high cost. Community thought time was right and should take advantage of working with other communities
- public vote at meeting pointed to where charges passes to go how to do. Did a combo flat rate and gallon rate
- aware spread word of mouth
- people who participated got a better understanding of the project. It allowed for people to understand that the waste water project is part of a "financial ecosystem", the improvement of the community infrastructure will make it more attractive to potential business and new residents.
- Addressed individual concerns relating to practical applications of project and modification of various items to better minimize costs to individuals (such as running public lines in backyards)
- no, project drove itself, people wanted good water
- led to more consensus
- knew that the people wanted
- no answer
- There are benefits, but I don't know any in particular
- gave potential users opportunity to review and understand what the project demanded better. [2

- two villages agreed on one single project (boards got together because of economies of scale)
- PP brought to our attention the need for the project, this made us look for money early on because we knew that there was a need but could not implement this project without a large sum.
- understanding and consensus
- "keeps people aware of what's going on", "keeps community together instead of rumors going on"
- different ideas and concerns, 2 public hearing both lead to plan revisions
- 5th time in front of board. 3-4 years without water cost concerns
- 11 miles with no water 80% petition

42. Do you have any suggestions for municipalities currently going through this process regarding public participation?

- get public in early and keep involved. Not until technical information is available, or will misconstrue.
- I feel community leaders should contact their community through the above methods. Also, community should ask for technical assistance early on to stay on track.
- My experience shows that PMFP Conferences, where local government officials can participate and learn from technical advisors (USDA, etc.) and other participants (communities), are most beneficial to communities in implementing better projects.
- one discovery is that 3rd party useful public more comfortable (3rd party technical advisor Rural Community Assistance Program, NYS Housing
- keep lines of communication open. Between administration and community, and within administration and community. Encourage feedback
- Try not to do behind the scenes. Always public meeting, always involve the public, don't make rash radical changes. A big obstacle is the fact that entire process takes a long time, through PP people can (and should) be informed of the true cost and time of the project in order to ensure that everyone supports a project that they truly understand the ramifications of.
- waste of time
- more people, more confusion. Official should take the lead
- early on send letters, assist production of petitions, don't go forward unless majority.
- If community is small enough can get away without one, but In a larger area, a properly designed survey is the best gauge of the need to move forward with a project.
- "Important that public kept informed, prevents anxious calls back." (public hearings)- lower anxious calls.
- well advertised, more than one meeting
- be upfront; answer questions quick, but find right answer do not hedge, get lawyer finance, engineer, cheap not best, review track record, couldn't in 1995, used to be up to you to check rural dev. Guidelines and engineer guidelines (but they changed)
- NA
- Create public forum to allow community to hear facts and process and public officials to listen to views. Get issues out early to address them (everyone better informed). When started, a lot in project was tentative, it is important to go back to public with new developments.
- continue to keep informed if people don't come to meetings, send letters to people with FYI
- strongly suggest that as early on as possible share information with community to get support. "Whatever you do, make sure that at a minimum all potential stakeholders understand" what the project is all about.

- as long as people informed, in favor and aware of costs it is up to local communities to make decision about project (not pub off)
- have good public hearings
- if at all
- be open and honest, keep the public informed
- people from very beginning facts
- no do what people say
- Each community faces a unique challenge, so cannot generalize advice for all, it is case specific
- no, each project has its own peculiarities. (but, make sure there is input from potential users)
- always good choice to bring community in on process
- "try to get people involved to be part of process" "a lot of work to be done that needs helping hand" . Because we are part-time officials with small or no staff (in smaller communities) we need the involvement of the community beyond merely approving the project, but also helping throughout by doing different tasks. People need to be involved throughout the process, we have to continue having surveys and informing people of new developments throughout the process.
- communicate
- "keep people updated whether good or bad" information comes up about the project.
- get everybody early, 51% petition before spending or effort
- "have to do it" imperative to have public support, 51% is not a majority 80%-90% is.

43. Was information regarding the development of rural utility projects across NYS available to you?

- none
- none
- yes, got it from USDA and TA local engineer
- yes, info from maxwell told of similar activities "we found out we were not unique"
- yes PMFP, Northeast AR Corp. .
- Yes, mostly from the engineering firm.
- absolutely. Applications come in the mail from Rural Development. Received help from part-time grant writer and engineering company. The biggest problem was that there were so many funding agencies that it was hard to understand where funding can be obtained for project (which was unique in its nature and funding needs).
- engineer showed another
- no relied on engineer
- NA
- Yes, through funding programs- Rural development and EFC.
- Yes through the EFC
- didn't know
- Cornell workshop, NYS workshop, neighboring boards
- yes NYC came to them and the whole area
- yes, through Tug Hill Commission and the Development Authority of the North Country (DANC)
- a town website downstate, Tug Hill commission engineers
- engineer
- Had I not attended Kim's workshop I would not have known about many opportunities regarding the project. Thank you to SU and Maxwell School of Business.

- yes, association of towns annual meeting (in February in NYC) met Dave Miller and all kinds of other agencies.
- limited
- no
- neighboring town
- used own engineer
- yes, mailings
- publications, local USDA
- yes, water superintendent called other villages. We did not seek USDA and EFC, they came to us.
- yes, could call, they (Rural Development) would provide me with relevant information.
- somewhat
- yes, a ton (ex. People you hire, like engineers)
- yes partnered with 3 towns
- supervisors worked together with 3 surrounding towns

44. Would this type of information be helpful in the process?

- none
- none
- yes
- yes
- yes because of the scope of projects, inter-municipal agreements probably will be the only way to do things in the future These conferences are helpful in seeing what is needed in order to have inter-municipal agreements.
- Yes
- yes, although sometimes the application process is very complicated, the application is at times "an inch thick", this causes confusion sometimes.
- no
- I don't know. Fired first engineer. Need a local engineer to talk to on daily basis.
- NA
- YES
- Some was helpful some was burdensome because there were several regulatory agencies that had a say in project. For example, two regulatory agencies had their engineers review project, had different evaluations. This kind of conflicting information was not helpful.
- it is important
- yes
- NA
- absolutely
- yes, they have a website other towns now use it. Did a live tv teleconferencing at a local college
- its important word of mouth in regard to hiring contractors
- Were it not for these forums, would not have met Dave Miller and other towns, great forum.
- yes, strongly
- yes
- yes, it is lacking now
- yes, she was a good friend with that town's supervisor. EFC and RCAP have been good

- no answer
- sure
- yes, no question
- yes
- yes
- yes, NY conference of mayors could be better. Simple lists of what's going on.
- yes

45. What can USDA do to improve public participation?

- give money quicker, maxwell neutral roundtable
- USDA has info on all projects in NYS, he only has contacts in a 15 mile radius. So they can give examples of projects elsewhere to make the process clearer and can provide contact information of municipalities that have already completed (or are in process) similar projects.
- "standardization" provide "roadmap" "more simplistic" "Mandatory to info in layman's terms" when USDA involved "always explain accronyms" especially at RT and FG. Get public involved and guide funds if get or don't get selected then what. Guidance.
- PP begins at home, the more informed people initiating projects (mayors/public officials) about the time frame, the necessity and how things work, the more successful projects can be. Need to inform the municipal leaders first, so they understand the time frames and know the best timing and way to approach a project. Better informed public officials can explain more clearly the circumstances surrounding a project to their community, avoiding confusion and gathering more public support for project. Being naïve a few years ago, information about the process, contacts, and timing would have been nice to know. What they are doing with PMFP is on the right track. (not just phone calls, need to have person to person contacts sometimes).
- not their role, individual community role, USDA looks at project and funds. "It is the responsibility of the community to gather support."
- no problems with USDA, the only thing is that they say that if you do this one thing, we will have an answer for you in a month, but come 2 months they don't. I guess their problem is funding, only have so much to go around. "Love to make promises they can't live up to." But openness of Dave and staff is appreciated.
- no not
- More pp. more confusion.
- not their job
- One of the most vital things that funding agencies can do to help communities is to develop guidelines for a survey that communities can implement before apply for funds. This survey should include vital technical information (statistics) about the specific situation in the community (technical profile of needs as well as community perceptions) . Ex:The survey that we implemented showed that 85% of surveyed had water shortages.
- came in after project was started with additional funding, at that point pp not needed, public (already) informed.
- advertise successful projects to other communities, show potential.
- streamline paperwork, too much duplication, they keep adding. Dev. Working relationships, frequent, daily/weekly contact.
- no

- not sure. Don't remember USDA required PP. We felt need in community. They should tell community here are a few ways of PP, you pick a couple that you feel comfortable with. Don't recommend they prescribe PP methods.
- I think USDA can provide the forum where all interested parties can meet and exchange relevant information, people need information have to get them prepared.
- not aware of any ways to increase PP. A problem that we faced during the two day seminar was that there were too many agencies and cannot possibly talk to all of them. Maybe there can be a better and more streamlined way fo informing and educating communities of the different opportunities that exist, as well as the process for applying and obtaining funds. So much going on with Federal and State government that it is hard to keep up. The problem is enhanced by the fact that many of us, in local government, are part time officials, we do not have the necessary time to allocate to the process on our own.
- No, doing a good job
- not really
- they seem so big, it is hard to say, I don't know what to say.
- no, they are doing a good job.
- not, really. Our experience with them has been good.
- they do a fine job, very happy with their work
- Does not know what EFC does to gather feedback about project.
- grant came from Rural Development.
- show benefits to communities, streamline process
- not sure, well, they do alright. But process is very time consuming, there is lots of red tape, lots of agencies to coordinate with (USDA, Bank) Maybe they can do something about cutting the red tape.
- not their responsibility, before funds, get 51% of assessed property owners signatures first, no more permissive referendums, get majority by petition first, this is huge. If change in project the 5% signing a petition can stop it.
- it is up to the community, they have 450 people- encourage before funding "madate it! (public participation)" must have public hearings.
-The Application Process is too long. Our concern throughout was if there would be enough money to pay for project when time came.
-One thing they could do is to have a "cookbook" "that tells you more information" about the process. Maybe bigger cities have larger staff working on each project, but we are a small community that needs a more precise outline to guide us in the process.

APPENDIX K

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

The following agreement confirms the intent of the Maxwell School Research Team, hereafter referred to as the Team, in providing services to United States Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Finance Center, hereafter jointly referred to as the Client.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of the project is to determine the extent to which public participation is present in the USDA process of funding water and waste water projects in rural communities in New York State. In addition, the project will assess the extent to which public participation leads to project success.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the purpose described above, the Team will first research and develop working definitions of public participation and water and waste water project success. The Team will then conduct phone interviews with leaders from a sample of rural communities in New York State with less than 10,000 residents eligible for USDA funds. These interviews will focus on the perceptions of leaders on the success of their community's specific project and the level of public participation during the phases of the project (conception, planning, application and implementation). In addition, the Team will attempt to identify other information sources to enhance the reliability of the study. The data gathered will then be analyzed by the Team.

DELIVERABLES

A formal written report and presentation to the Client on June 5, 2003 will be comprised of the following:

1. A database containing the data collected through the interviews with community leaders.
2. A methodology for assessing the role of public participation in the USDA process and for the extent to which it impacts project success.
3. An analysis of the data obtained from the sampled communities using the methodology developed.
4. Suggestions to the Client to improve the success of the funding process and better meet the needs the rural communities

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

All members of the Maxwell School Team agree to keep all non-quantitative information and data gathered from community interviews and from the Client strictly confidential.

_____ _____

David A. Miller, P.E.
Rural Utility Service
USDA

Date

_____ _____

Kimberly J. Farrell
Director, Public Management and Finance Program
Co-Director, Environmental Finance Center
Maxwell School, Syracuse University

Date

_____ _____

Viktor Bojilov, Hiroaki Kanazawa, Michael N'Dolo,
Marti Reinfeld, Edward Tyler, Maria Ines Vasquez,
Thomas Webster.

Date

APPENDIX L

INTERVIEW GLOSSARY

After approval- The stage of the process following USDA approval up until project completion. Construction phase.

Comment period usually involves an opportunity for interested persons to write or call opinions about the government's proposal in response to a notice or announcement.

Consensus – agreement among interested parties

During application- The stage between the initiation of the application and USDA approval to go ahead with the project.

Focus groups- an invitation only group, usually 8-10, all members sharing similar views on the project, convened to discuss issues related to the project.

Neutral facilitator is an outside party, educated on the issues impartial to any particular outcome, brought in to organize and manage a discussion.

Prior to application- the stage of the process before the community has begun the formal USDA application process. The conception and initial planning phase.

Public Hearing is a formal meeting where officials can provide information about the project and receive feedback from the community members present.

Public participation- the extent to which community members concerned and impacted by the project are aware and able to influence a decision.

Records available to the public- Notices, announcements and meeting minutes published or otherwise accessible, which can provide accountability and transparency. If someone missed an event, they would be able to catch up.

Roundtables- an invitation only group, usually 25-50, members with diverse viewpoints, convened to discuss issues related to the project.

Surveys, Key Interviews- data gathering instrument used to draw out the concerns of community members.

APPENDIX M

MUNICIPALITIES SURVEYED

North Country
Town of Alexandria
Town of Aurora
Town of Binghamton
Town of Cairo
Town of Cape Vincent
Town of Champion
Town of Clayton
Town of Deerfield-Trenton/Miller Road
Town of Dewitt
Town of Jasper
Town of Jerusalem
Town of Junius
Town of Marilla
Town of Orleans
Town of Pamelia
Town of Sheridan
Town of Tyre
Town of Yates
Village of Black River
Village of Broadalbin
Village of Canastota
Village of Carthage
Village of Chateaugay
Village of Chaumont
Village of Clayton
Village of Hobart
Village of Madison
Village of Nunda
Village of Richmondville
Village of Theresa