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Principles and Practices for Developing Leadership and Engagement in Communities

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Abstract:

Effectively done, public and stakeholder involvement results in stronger, more complete, more locally owned, and more ecologically and socially sustainable initiatives that become integral parts of the fabric of communities. Ineffectively done, public and stakeholder involvement leaves individuals and groups frustrated, uncommitted, and resistant, and creates often chronic and acute currents of negativity and opposition that can cripple an otherwise well designed initiative.

Successful public and stakeholder involvement is determined in large part by the approach used by professionals and experts who seek to gain public and stakeholder involvement, and by the processes employed by the convening organizations to cultivate and establish commitment by the public and other stakeholders.

Effective involvement occurs when citizens and other stakeholders choose long-term commitment to an initiative, when they are equal partners engaged in community-based problem solving, and when they gain awareness of their inherent power and ability to act and see that their contributions are genuinely valued and make a meaningful, positive difference.

To achieve this level of commitment, professionals, experts, and conveners must focus less on desired outcomes and more on process, less on control and more on relationship building, less on directing and more on catalyzing, less on telling and more on listening, less on dispensing expertise and more on asking the right questions and facilitating effective conversations.

Experts, professionals, and convening organizations will be most successful at public and stakeholder involvement when sufficient time and energy are invested in designing and implementing processes that build good relationships, invite full partnership, and generate constructive conversation and ultimately effective decision-making and management. This presentation will give an overview of the principles and practices of civic engagement that result in the kind of long-term, sustainable commitment by the public and other stakeholders necessary to achieve long-term, sustainable stewardship of watersheds and water resources.

Impact Statement:

Long term significant change requires long term commitment from individuals and groups in communities. When experts skillfully engage individuals and groups, projects are better designed and implemented. Outcomes include local ownership, an improved sense of community, engaged and empowered citizens, and a sense of aspiration about what is possible to achieve in working together to create a better future.

Category: Committee for Shared Leadership

Type of Presentation: Oral Presentation