



Setting the Course for  
Improved Water Quality

# Public Participation

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

*A TMDL training program for local government leaders and other  
water resource managers – Session 4a*



# Presentation goals

- Define public participation
- Discuss benefits of involving the public in your TMDL Study
- Review important public participation objectives



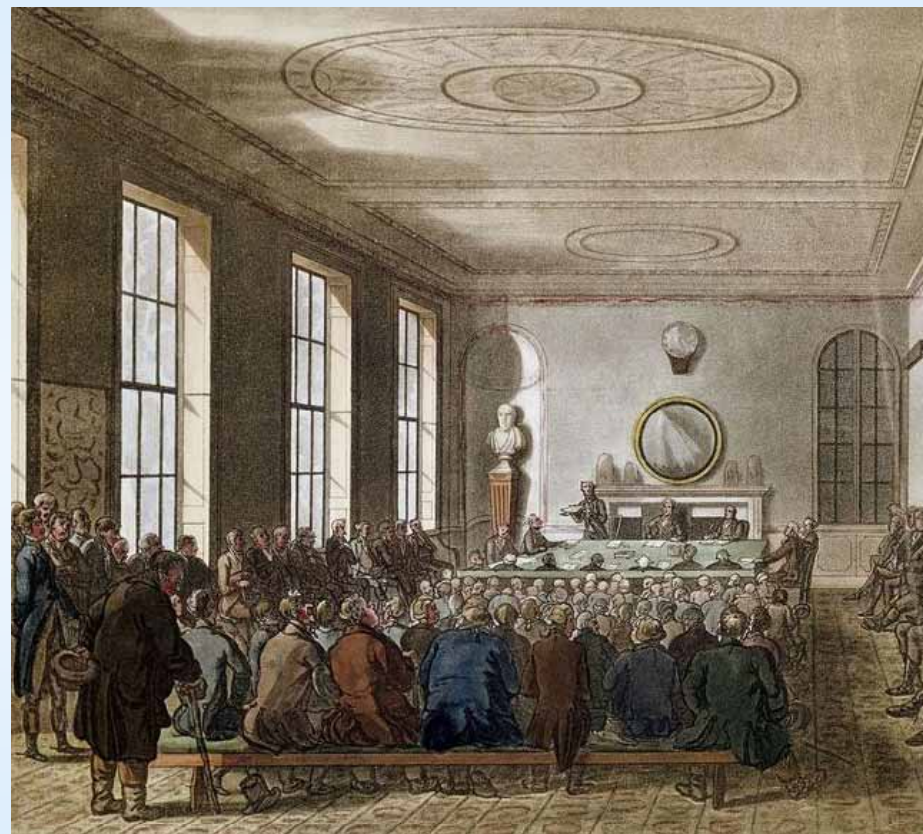
# Public participation is important because...

- Technical staff can suggest endpoints for TMDLs, however, pollutant load and reduction strategies have to be created by users
- TMDLs often dependent on changes in individual behaviors
- People are more likely to support ideas or strategies they helped create
- TMDLs will not be approved without it



“The highest measure of democracy is neither the ‘extent of freedom’, nor the ‘extent of equality’, but rather, the highest measure of participation.”

– A. d. Benoist





# Public participation defined

“Public participation is the involvement of people in a problem-solving or decision-making process that may interest or affect them.”

– *Dr. John M. Bryson  
Humphrey Institute*







# Core values of participatory decision making

- Full participation
- Mutual understanding
- Inclusive solutions
- Shared responsibility
- Increasing capacity for managing water resources into the future





# Benefits of public participation

- Creates greater trust between government and the public
- Public will quickly uncover fatal flaws in assumptions, approach or solutions
- Citizens provide fresh, creative ideas
- Citizens, stakeholders can advocate for your project in unique ways





# Benefits of public participation

- Provides opportunity to learn about the complexities in the TMDL process
- Reduces potential for controversy and legal challenges during implementation
- Creates a transparent process – improves government accountability at all levels
- It is inspiring to be with others that care about water quality





# Who makes up “the public”?

## Citizens –

the general public  
residing in the  
watershed

## Stakeholders –

individuals,  
organizations or other  
interested parties which  
have an interest or  
“stake” in the outcome  
of a particular planning  
process

Examples: farmers, anglers, lake associations,  
developers, environmental organizations, local officials,  
businesses, taxpayers, etc.



# Opportunities for **citizen** involvement in the TMDL process

- Water quality problem identification stage
- Water quality goal-setting
- Open houses, public meetings
- DRAFT TMDL Study public comment period
- Volunteer monitoring activities
- TMDL implementation activities (BMPs)
- Others





# Opportunities for **stakeholder** involvement in the TMDL process

- Water quality problem identification stage
- Water quality goal-setting
- Workplans
- Point/nonpoint allocation determination
- Open houses, public meetings
- DRAFT TMDL Study public comment period
- TMDL Implementation Plan development
- Advocacy and implementation





# How much involvement ?

- No *one-size-fits-all* approach
- Depends on
  - complexity of the watershed(s)
  - number of impairments
- Public participation can be simple or complex
- There are a range of public participation tools to fit any scenario



# Before conducting public participation activities

- Take time to understand what is needed
- Be clear on goals for public involvement
- Be certain you understand the time commitment you are making
- Ensure you have adequate administrative and financial resources available
- Workplan should reflect resource needs





# Before conducting public participation activities

- Be ready to adapt to changing circumstances
- Be prepared to follow-through on commitments and promises
- Understand that, for your project, **you** are a keeper of the public's trust
- Make every effort to involve the critics



# Before conducting public participation activities

Understand that all watersheds are not created equal

Accept that some TMDLs may require more patience and persistence



# Determine how complex your public participation plan must be

- Tailor participation strategy to needs of the project
- Stakeholder advisory committees not always needed or appropriate (*consider alternatives*)
- Large, complex watersheds with multiple impairments more likely to need resource-intensive participation strategies



# Develop a plan appropriate to your situation



- The plan should help you to gather “good ideas” to consider
- Use the plan to gain “informed consent” for solutions selected

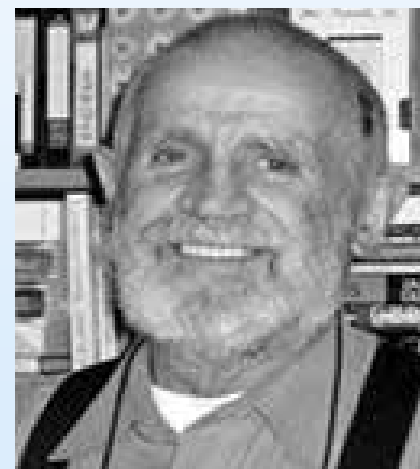


# Working with skeptics

Work to accomplish **Informed Consent**

“The grudging willingness of opponents to “go along” with a course of action that they actually are opposed to.”

– *Dr. Hans Bleiker*







# Why is informed consent important?

## Don't

“preach to the choir”

## Do

actively work to gain consent from greatest critics

## Why?

Because critics can “bring down” projects and frustrate efforts to solve problems



# How do you build informed consent?

1. Actively seek out opponents to the TMDL project or its goals
2. Inform, listen, ask probing questions
3. Actively involve opponents in developing “good ideas” to solve water quality problems



While achieving  
informed consent is a  
critical goal, public  
participation can be  
so much more!

Be creative!





# Important public participation objectives

## To be successful:

1. Establish and maintain the legitimacy of your organization to manage the TMDL
2. Establish that the TMDL is required by law
3. Establish the legitimacy of your decision-making process

# Important public participation objectives

4. Identify and get to know all interests within the project area
5. See the project through their eyes
6. Identify and understand their problems
7. Be able to clearly articulate key issues







# Important public participation objectives

8. Generate an array of possible solutions
9. Protect your credibility
10. Ensure information reaches, and is understood by your stakeholders
11. Be open to hearing and understanding stakeholders – We are not always the experts!
12. Bring together stakeholders with opposing views to learn



**The health of our waters  
is the principal measure of  
how we live on the land."**

**– Luna Leopold**