

EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency
2011 Community Involvement Training Conference
Community Involvement in the 21st Century: Embracing Diversity,
Expanding Engagement, Utilizing Technology

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Expanding Engagement in Large Public
Comment Listening Forums
July 19 12:45pm
Adam Saslow



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Thank you!

Let's begin today's session!

A Community Engagement Forum:

Large Scale Public Involvement Processes
Mountain Top Removal and Hydraulic Fracturing

Presented by Adam R. Saslow and Curt D. Gervich
to US EPA Community Involvement Conference
July 19, 2011

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Who Are These Guys?

- Adam R. Saslow
 - Wall Street to Atlanta... through EPA/HQ
 - Professional Facilitator since 1998
 - Recent High Profile Projects include Anniston, AL, Mountain Top Removal (Spruce #1) and Hydraulic Fracturing
- Curt Gervich - SUNY Plattsburg
 - MS and PhD in Environmental and Natural Resource Planning
 - 12 years experience with NGOs and government agencies in areas of habitat conservation planning, participatory planning and community sustainability (among others...)
 - Research organizational and environmental decision making
 - Teach courses in environmental management, environmental law & policy and sustainability.

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Today's Discussion - Objectives

- Create the experience of an EPA large public forum
- Demonstrate process and tactics used in several successful forums
- Make the case that large public forums will be increasingly common in the future... but they must be done BETTER than they are today - PCI Method.
- Identify crucial steps to convening successful large public forums
- Share wisdom, and produce new wisdom, about large public forums to improve future performance

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Experiencing "PCI"
(Plexus Community Involvement)

- Registration Process
- Environment
- Training... and Speaking
- Time Management
- Active Listening - What Did We Hear?
- Security

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Creating the experience of an EPA large public forum

- You just experienced a replication of our MTR and Fracking work
 - Media, live streaming, PR packages and interviews
 - Registration
 - Online Pre-registration
 - Onsite computer registration
 - Speaker's list and wristbands
 - Brief tutorial on effective public comments
 - Publicly visible clock and equitable treatment for all speakers
 - Organized speakers' lines and no-gap timing
 - Behind-the-scenes
 - Constant and immediate communication among facilitators
 - Security and safety personnel

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Today's Discussion Vehicles – Two Cases

- Mountain Top Removal – Spruce No. 1.
 - Mingo Logan, WV
- Hydraulic Fracturing
 - Dallas, TX
 - Denver, CO
 - Canonsburg, PA
 - Binghamton, NY

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Mountain Top Removal – Spruce #1

- EPA was reviewing the permit for surface mining at Spruce No. 1 in Logan County, WV in the Spruce Fork Watershed, an area highly impacted by previous mining activities.
- The Spruce No. 1 Mine is one of the largest surface mining operations ever authorized in Appalachia.
- The Mingo Logan Coal Company was already authorized by the USACE and WV to construct six "valley fills" and numerous sedimentation ponds

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Mountain Top Removal – Spruce #1

- Complex, Controversial, Emotionally Charged Public Meeting
- Personal involvement from Mr. Sussman, Mr. Garvin and senior-most OW officials as well as others
- 1,100 people and LOTS of protestors (including a sanctioned demonstration) OUTSIDE (not inside)
- 75 Police officers
- Bomb Squads
- Secret Service detail that protected Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell
- And... Plexus LI

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MTR and Plexus, LI

- Our staff worked as a subcontractor to SRA International
- SRA did some of the logistical work and arranged for court reporters and transcribing.
- SRA managed the pre-registration process
- Plexus managed all on-site operations, logistics and facilitation
- This was, essentially, a public hearing.
 - Of course when you open things up to the public, SOMETIMES you get what you are looking for... and sometimes a WHOLE lot more.

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Shifting gears.... To the next case...




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Identification and Prioritization of Case Studies

- Stakeholder recommendations
- Vulnerable water resources
 - Proximity of other wells, exposure pathways
 - Extent of activity (wells/acre)
- Geologic conditions
- Geographic variations



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Hydraulic Fracturing and Plexus LI

- EPA wanted to obtain stakeholder suggestions on the study design.
 - Of course when you open things up to the public, SOMETIMES you get what you are looking for... and sometimes a WHOLE lot more.
- Our staff worked as a subcontractor to the CADMUS Group
- Cadmus did some of the off-site logistics, pre-registration and all of the recording
- Plexus managed operations, logistics and facilitation

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Hydraulic Fracturing Community Involvement – Characteristics

- Complex, Controversial, Emotionally Charged Public Meeting
- Personal involvement from Mr. Sussman, four RA's, and senior-most OW officials as well as others
- 500 to 5,000 people
- Protestors OUTSIDE
- 85 Police officers (in Binghamton... less elsewhere)
- Bomb Squads
- Media
- And... Plexus LI

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Make the case that large public forums will be increasingly common in the future

- Current and future regulation and permitting challenges are landscape scale and therefore include huge numbers of stakeholders
 - MTR
 - Fracking
 - CO₂, CH₄ and other GHGs
- As environmental and economic crunch tightens, interest, stakes and passions flare
- Social networking technology increases awareness and participation
- Societal trends in how Americans view government and industry increase rancor and participation
 - Katrina
 - BP
 - Yellowstone River Spill
 - RGGI
 - EPA posturing and actions

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So How Does One Engage the Community?

Generally...

- Create and manage expectations and every point of contact!
- Be sure to be responsive to ALL concerns
- When you don't know the answer, it IS appropriate to say: "I don't know"... followed by "but I will find out."

Specifically...

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So How Does One Engage the Community... Before the Meeting

- Identify local leadership
- Landscape Assessment *** as time allows
- Outreach, education and support
- Pre-registration (electronic and by phone)
- Information – (electronic and hard copy)
- Personal touch - Disney

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So How Does One Engage the Community... During the Meeting

- Operations ("Outside" the room)
 - Team communication
 - Know your community!
 - Safe, comfortable environment – facility AND security
 - Registration Process
 - Wristbands
- Facilitation ("Inside" the room)
 - Team communication (listed twice because it is TWICE as important)
 - Training
 - Flow
 - Clear groundrules – time, positioning and props
 - Equitably enforced
 - Humor... and authority

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So How Does One Engage the Community... After the Meeting

- Be accessible!
- Candid, direct answers... even when they may not be popular.
- If you don't know... admit it... and find out.
- Let your words dictate your actions.

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Conclusions

- Creating a safe environment is critical
- Pay for it now... or pay for it later ☺
- Community Engagement – Nothing to Lose and EVERYTHING to Gain
- Transparency Speaks VOLUMES
- And thematically:
create expectations... and meet them.

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THANK YOU!!! For More Information...

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