

Working for Clean Water
An Information Program for Advisory Groups

Role of Advisory Groups

Why have an advisory group?

Who should be members of an advisory group?

What should an advisory group do?

How should an advisory group be organized?

What makes an advisory group worthwhile?

Citizen Handbook



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Role of Advisory Groups

Will They Listen To Us?

Anyone who participates on an advisory group will ask at some point: Who cares about what we say, and will they do anything about it? This is an advisory group's most important concern. It is at the heart of key issues concerning the role of advisory groups.

- Why have an advisory group?
- Who should be the members of an advisory group?
- What should an advisory group do?
- How should an advisory group be organized?
- What makes an advisory group worthwhile?

The understanding of these issues and how they are dealt with will go a long way in determining whether or not an advisory group is effective.

There is no absolute guarantee for success in the work of an advisory group. However, the chances for success are better if the advisory group:

- Has a balanced membership
- Is interested and willing to devote the necessary time
- Understands what is expected of all participants.

This last point is especially important. Advisory groups need to realize their role, and the useful things they can do to help achieve clean water goals. It is essential that there is no confusion about their work.

From the outset the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the grantee who receives federal funds for planning and constructing wastewater treatment facilities, and the advisory group

must understand what is expected of each other. There can be no hidden agenda.

Why Have an Advisory Group?

Public participation is as American as baseball. The "association" or "interest group" is one important way Americans participate in making public policy. Grassroots organizations, public interest and consumer groups, and voluntary service organizations all seek representation on an equal footing with governmental and economic interests. Advisory groups can serve this purpose.

The last two decades have shown that the public can play an extremely important role in decision making in both the public and private sectors. Public participation is complex and often misunderstood. Not inherently "good" or "bad", it can help things to happen or it can bring projects to a grinding halt.

Through water quality management planning we are now making progress toward meeting our clean water goals. These actions affect everyone in some way: taxes or user fees, availability of clean water for recreation, new wastewater treatment facilities, effects on growth patterns, and new political and statutory requirements. The people who will be living with the results should be involved in the planning. The advisory group is a useful way to get such involvement.

Advisory groups serve three important functions in water quality planning.

- identifying the public's interest in clean water
- making diverse views known to decision makers
- taking local values into account in the decision-making process.

Clean water is a necessity of life. We ignore its degradation at our own risk. How we go about achieving clean water in terms of time, responsibilities, and the use of assets (money, manpower, and natural resources) is important to the social, economic, and environmental well-being of the community as well as the nation.

Achieving clean water involves the government, the private sector, the people of an area, and special interests. There are many voices to be heard. The forum provided by the advisory group can help harmonize these voices into actions which will be of the greatest possible benefit.

A plan must fit the needs and conditions of the local area or community. Advisory group members should be knowledgeable about local issues, resources, and potential conflicts.

Resolving conflict, if it can be achieved at all, can often be accomplished through the use of an advisory group. Consensus is an achievable goal in an atmosphere of open communication and understanding.

It's the Law

Section 101 (e) of The Clean Water Act, states:

Public participation in the development, revision, and enforcement of any regulation, standard, effluent limitation, plan or program established by the Administrator or any State under this Act shall be provided for, encouraged, and assisted by the Administrator and the States. The Administrator, in cooperation with the States, shall develop and publish regulations specifying minimum guidelines for public participation in such processes.

The 1977 Clean Water Act and EPA regulations implementing the Act require public participation when developing and carrying out water quality management plans. *Each state and agency conducting 208 areawide planning must have an advisory committee.* Advisory committees are required in 201 facilities planning only for large, complex, or controversial projects. The EPA's Rules and Regulations govern the formation and functioning of these advisory groups.

Who Should Be the Members?

There should be a balance of representative interests in the membership of an advisory group. The EPA regulations specify:

- Private citizens
- Public interest groups
- Public officials
- Representatives of organizations with substantial economic interests in the plan or project.

Having such interests represented is important if a politically acceptable water quality management system is to be developed.

Size of Membership

There is no magic number for the size of an advisory group. It should not be so small as to be unrepresentative, or so large as to become unmanageable. A dozen like-minded people may make a very congenial group, but their recommendations and advice may be highly suspect because they may not represent a full range of community interests. A group of fifty would have difficulty in setting mutually agreeable meeting dates, in organizing, and even greater difficulty in reaching consensus on an issue.

The size of the group should be determined on a case-by-case basis by the complexity of the job to be done and the number of interested people. Time, interest, and a pertinent agenda are the essential ingredients for an advisory group that expects to function successfully.

Identification of Membership

The grantee is charged with the responsibility of establishing an advisory group. This agency must identify the private citizens, public interest groups, economic interests, and the public officials who are interested in or who might be affected by a project. The agency must make active efforts to inform people in the area, and get suggestions for potential advisory group members. These activities include:

- Announcements to news media
- Written notices to interested organizations

Public appearances

Direct contacts.

During its first meeting the advisory group should check to see if its membership is representative. Are any relevant individuals, organizations, or interests missing?

What Should An Advisory Group Do?

The advisory group must recognize that the primary responsibility for decision making in water quality management lies with elected officials or their appointees. Even so, the role of an advisory group can be extremely useful during the planning process. It is essential that early on a well-defined, important role is established for the advisory group.

The responsibility of the advisory group is to *advise*. This can be an important undertaking if several things happen, including:

- The group does its homework in understanding the issues

- The group develops practical, thought-out recommendations

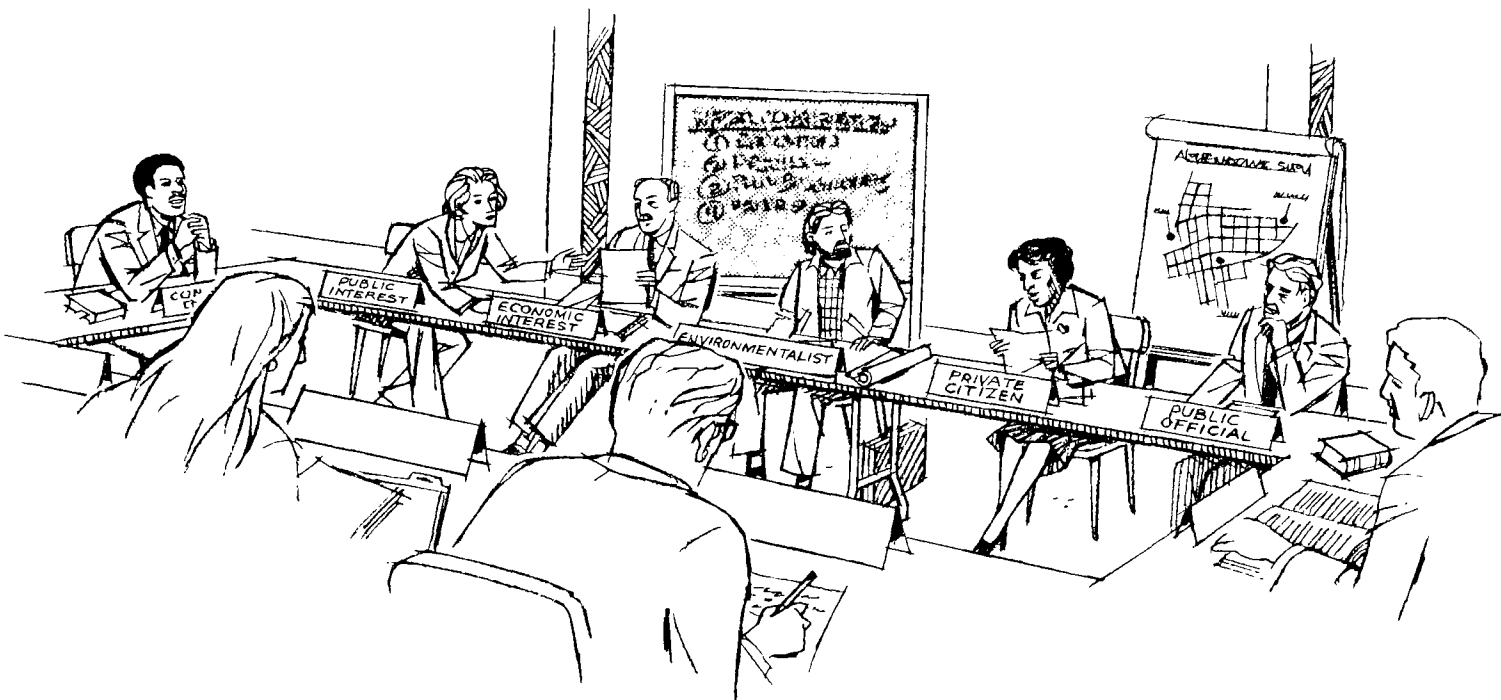
- The group achieves consensus in support of its recommendations

The group establishes credibility through its work.

Remember, the role is to advise! An advisor is *not* expected to become a professional or a technician in water quality management planning. Advisory groups may not be able to offer highly detailed and technical judgments. However, they should have enough technical knowledge and an understanding of local conditions to provide credible advice about policy matters. Advisory groups should make sure that the public's views and values are communicated to the grantee.

While gaining competence in water quality planning, the advisory group should always remember its responsibility. An advisory group represents the public. It is not part of the staff. Many advisory groups have suffered when they inadvertently have become working extensions of the grantees and their staffs.

Water quality planning is done at several levels. 208 planning has a state, regional, and areawide scope. The 201 deals with planning, designing, and constructing local wastewater treatment facilities. Although these plans sometimes overlap, they are basically compatible. Local 201 facility planning issues are often addressed in 208 planning. State 208 planning documents are correspondingly used as an informational resource in 201 facility planning.



201 Issues

- What are the water quality problems?
- Are the existing control facilities adequate?
- What unique resources does the area have that are worth protecting?
- How large should a new facility be if it is to be cost-effective?
- How much wastewater will the population produce?
- Where does industry fit into the facility-sizing picture?
- What about commercial and industrial wastewater flows?
- How is the total wastewater flow estimated?
- Is it better to reduce flows or to plan for growth?
- What geographic areas will the facility serve?
- Are there any small-scale service area options?
- What are the regional options?

From such current and future issues the advisory group will select its agenda of work, always keeping in mind the overall objectives and schedule of the project. This should be done with a clear understanding from the grantee as to where the advisory group can be most helpful. The group should determine if it has the resources to deal with those responsibilities, and then develop a course of action.

Also the progress of the project should be monitored as it relates to the agenda of the advisory group. To do this effectively efforts must be made to increase the understanding and competency of the group members. The training sessions offered by the EPA and the grantee can be of assistance.

Makes Recommendations

The advisory group assists public officials in their final decision-making responsibilities. It offers recommendations to these officials on the important issues involved in water quality planning.

Promotes Dialogue

The workings of the advisory group should encourage constructive communication and understanding among all parties. This kind of "give and take" is extremely important throughout the planning process. It will help to develop:

- Mutual respect for various viewpoints
- A willingness to take all considerations into account
- The ability to arrive at recommendations that serve the public interest.

In order to promote dialogue, each member has the dual responsibility of representing as clearly and accurately as possible his/her ideas, and of listening carefully to the views of others. Often this key responsibility is overlooked. However, effective advisory groups have members who are good talkers and good listeners.

208 Issues

- What is the economy of the region, and how will it develop?
- What will be the future population, and how will it be distributed?
- How significant is the rural or urban stormwater runoff?
- What future land uses are projected, and what existing laws and regulations apply?
- How is the state and areawide water quality management plan expected to be implemented and operated?
- What are the nonpoint sources of pollution in the area?
- How does water quality management planning relate to other types of local, county, and areawide planning? How are differences resolved?

Responsibilities of the Grantee

The grantee is expected to provide support for the activities of advisory groups, and consider their recommendations. The EPA regulations address a number of the responsibilities of the assisted agency:

- Establish advisory groups

- Inform people in the affected area

- Receive suggestions as to the make-up of the advisory group

- Provide information, technical skills, and staff support

- Carefully consider advisory group recommendations and requests, and respond to them

- Transmit the advisory group's recommendations to the decision-making officials

- Involve the advisory group in a public participation program.

Communication is crucial to effective water quality planning and implementation. A liaison often conducts relationships between the grantee and the advisory group. The effectiveness of the liaison can be judged through a few questions: Is this person comfortable in working with people in an advisory group-agency relationship? Are the activities of the advisory group relevant and mutually agreeable? Are the requests or recommendations of the advisory group receiving reasonably prompt consideration? Is the advisory group receiving sufficient support?

Become knowledgeable of the needs and values of the community

Listen to the viewpoints of all advisory group members

Attend meetings regularly

Take actions and present findings to the grantee

Help mobilize community support for water quality management decisions.

How Should An Advisory Group Be Organized?

An advisory group should determine the details of its own organization. Time should not be wasted in establishing an elaborate structure. Time should be spent dealing with activities that the group determines are important.

Choose Officers

Minimal organization should include a chairperson and vice-chairperson. A temporary leader may be chosen for the first few meetings. After the members have become better acquainted with each other, permanent officers may be elected. Officers should serve a specified term (one or two years) and be eligible for re-election.

The group may also wish to have a secretary and/or treasurer. Since the grantee may provide recording and support services, this consideration depends upon the given situation.

Establish By-Laws

The advisory group may establish its own by-laws and rules of procedure, or may use something which is more formal and generally recognized such as "Robert's Rules of Order". The group should not get bogged down in determining formal or detailed procedures so that the really important matters can be accomplished without delay.

Schedule Meetings and Agendas

A regular schedule for meetings should be established as soon as possible. However, this determination may be delayed until the membership is relatively certain (perhaps after the first two meetings). It is an important decision where busy people are involved, and conflicting schedules can bring last minute complications.

Meetings should be scheduled, as necessary, and have an agenda. They should be announced as far in advance as possible and should be open to the public. An opportunity for the public to comment should be provided at each meeting.

Regular attendance at meetings should be expected. A policy concerning the number of acceptable consecutive absences by a member should be established. If a member misses more than the accepted number,

he/she should be requested to reconsider participation on the advisory group.

Set Budget

The financial resources needed for the advisory group activities should be determined jointly by the grantee and the advisory group. This could include technical assistance and payment for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses such as educational materials and field trips. Provision can be made for these needs in the budget of the grantee with the agreement of the EPA.

Appoint Subcommittees

Depending on how the advisory group wishes to proceed, subcommittees may be established to investigate and develop recommendations on specific issues. Technical assistance may be provided if the group desires expert advice from someone other than the grantee or its consultant.

Similarly, information should be sought from reputable people and interests in the community. This will help to insure that advice to the grantee takes into account every appropriate resource and consideration.

Recommendations made to the decision makers should be made through the advisory group, not subcommittees of the group. Subcommittees should make recommendations only to the advisory group as a whole.

Take Action

As fully as possible advisory group actions should express the consensus of the members. Depending on the situation, unanimous actions may or may not be achievable. Gaining a significant consensus, not just a simple majority, should be a general objective.

The advisory group is a forum. It provides an opportunity for the presentation of wide-ranging views and judgments. It provides the opportunity for argument, debate, and the resolution of conflicts. It provides the opportunity to hear the facts, to become aware of individual concerns, and to appreciate the emotional climate that may bear on an issue.

Present Findings

The preparation of various memoranda and short reports presenting the views and findings are part of the group's responsibilities. Just as important, these activities should be visible to all parties involved through meetings, press releases, and other efforts. This will help the community to gain an understanding about water quality issues, and how the community might best deal with them. The work of the advisory group should help provide a sound basis for taking actions.

What Makes An Advisory Group Worthwhile?

What happens to the recommendations of advisory groups? The answers given to this question reflect the usefulness of the group.

Are the recommendations simply ignored? Are they listened to and then rationalized away? Do they generate questions which require further consideration and response, perhaps including a modification of the recommendations? Are the recommendations followed? Every advisory group should periodically answer these questions. Simply put, the group's recommendations should be monitored. If the recommendations of the advisory group are being ignored or are not being followed in any significant way, members should determine why this is happening. The immediate reaction should not be one of hurt feelings and rejection.

Attention should be directed to whether or not the advisory group is dealing with the right issues. Perhaps the issues simply are not important to the community or to the decision makers. If this is the case the advisory group must decide whether to convince the community and decision makers of the importance of the issues, or modify the work program to address different issues.

Additionally, the advisory group should attempt to determine its credibility: does it have credibility? if not, why not? does the membership reflect the community? is the work regarded as meaningless? is the group perceived as being under someone's thumb, and therefore highly suspect?

The group can strive to make its efforts worthwhile by:

- Developing a program that is important to the community and decision makers
- Being certain that recommendations are well thought out
- Being persistent in following up on recommendations
- Being protective of the reputation of the advisory group.

For its part the grantee should:

- See that the advisory group has staff support and access to information
- See that the advisory group plays a role in the overall public participation program
- See that advice and recommendations of the advisory group are carefully considered.

Remember, the advisory group is just one element of a larger public participation effort. The time and effort undertaken in advising the grantee can make a big difference in realizing the maximum benefit from water quality management planning.

Citizen Representatives	Review Board	Task Force	Advisory Group	Public Hearing	Informational Meeting	Workshop
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The advisory group is one of many public participation opportunities.

Can an Advisory Group Make A Difference?

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Introduction

In the summer of 1979 the Gettysburg Municipal Authority's Advisory Group held its first meeting—three years *after* the Gettysburg 201 Wastewater Management Facilities Plan had been completed and approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources!

The complexities of designing a water quality management system which meets with public approval had again become a seemingly impossible task. The uncoordinated and sometimes contrary goals of state, local, and federal agencies became apparent. The result was the halt of facilities planning, with the process returning to preliminary planning in Step One¹ and preparation of an environmental impact statement.²

The specific circumstances surrounding this case are indeed unique. The basic problems, however, are repeated in similar situations across the nation. The question is, of course:

Can an advisory group make a difference?

Background

Located in southcentral Pennsylvania, Gettysburg is most commonly recognized for the Civil War battlefield surrounding the town. The wastewater treatment plant at Gettysburg became inadequate for the treatment of wastes in the 1960's. In 1969 the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources (DER) informed the municipal authority that the plant was in violation of the state's Clean Streams Law, and that corrections had to be made. By 1973 the additional pollution load placed on the system by increased development and excessive stormwater infiltration prompted the DER to order a construction ban on new development until the situation could be improved. During this period it became obvious that a new treatment plant was needed. A consultant was hired to begin Step One planning for a new facility. During the facility planning period flow controls and water conservation corrected the infiltration and overload problem to the degree that the ban could be temporarily lifted. A schedule was developed for constructing new facilities, but opposition to the plan mounted.

The Arrangement

In the early 1970's regional facilities were favored by planners. Accordingly, the Gettysburg Plan called for a regional plant what would serve not only Gettysburg but also four townships surrounding Gettysburg. Between 1976 and 1978 the task of developing a mutual agreement between the townships and the Gettysburg Municipal Authority for service and financial arrangements was undertaken. It was finally secured in 1978. During the same period, the Authority worked with the National Park Service to resolve the concern that future development permitted or prompted by the sewage system would intrude on the beautiful historic surroundings of the park.

A Delay

The Authority was prepared in 1978 to apply for a Step Two design grant.³ However, yet to be signed was a memorandum of agreement between six groups: The Municipal Authority, the DER, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the National Park Service, and the Council on Historic Preservation.

The Council on Historic Preservation in its draft memorandum of agreement called for zoning to prevent unsightly development in townships adjacent to the service area. However, such zoning in the conservative farm areas of southcentral Pennsylvania was impossible to achieve. The Council documented that a significant adverse cultural impact could occur without such restrictions on development. A full-scale environmental impact statement was ordered.

A New Beginning and an Advisory Group

What essentially happened at Gettysburg was that the goals of one agency conflicted with the goals of other interests. Regional treatment plants often spur development. In some areas this pattern may be desirable, but in Gettysburg such development would intrude on the national park. This plan conflicted with the goals of the Council on Historic Preservation. Thus, the planning returned to the beginning of the Step One planning process.

If an advisory group had been in existence throughout the project, could it possibly have made a difference in the final outcome? The answer would appear to be *yes*! An advisory group would have been integrally involved in the discussions over mutual agreements among the federal, state, and local agencies. An advisory group, representing the community as a whole, could have been a unifying force in these discussions.

The Gettysburg Advisory Group and Its Activities

The Gettysburg advisory group was formed in the summer of 1979 in accordance with the EPA guidelines for public participation. Its task was to advise the Municipal Authority on development of a treatment system which would not only be compatible with the goals of state and federal agencies, but would also meet community goals.

Membership

The Gettysburg advisory group membership, as selected by the Municipal Authority, consists of the following representation:

- Private citizens
- League of Women Voters
- National Park Service
- Taxpayers Association
- Historic Gettysburg Adams County
- Gettysburg Area Chamber of Commerce
- Retail Merchants Association
- Builders Association
- Landlords of Gettysburg
- Four public officials from area municipalities.

Concern

The initial meetings of the advisory group developed a dialogue typical of newly formed organizations. Such questions as *Why are we here?* and *What can we possibly achieve?* characterized the feelings of the new group. This is not surprising since the citizens sitting on this advisory group had witnessed the complex history surrounding the previous plan. The proposed project had been controversial due to:

- the concern over the ability of the community to afford a regional system
- sharing of costs by the municipalities involved
- the planning and zoning restrictions stipulated by the National Park Service
- the building ban implemented by the DER, and the possibility of future bans if a treatment facility was not built within reasonable time.

Organization

At the first monthly meeting of the group, administrative responsibilities, budget, and scheduling were addressed. Informational materials were distributed.

At the second meeting the role of the advisory group was explained by both the chairman of the Municipal Authority and the Public Participation Coordinator of the EPA. A briefing about the history of the project was given. Following this discussion the group considered the role it was expected to play. One of the concerns noted was that the advisory group might find itself in the thankless role of being arbitrators between all the parties involved.

After the first two meetings the group still had not selected permanent officers. However, during the third meeting a permanent chairperson was elected.

Initiatives

After discussion of organizational and procedural matters at the second meeting, the group chose to hear a progress report from the representatives of the consulting firm preparing the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the EPA. It was hoped that this report might help the group better understand its role. Indeed, this did occur. During the presentation it became obvious that the degree of investigation into water supply was inadequate in the eyes of the advisory group. The citizens in the advisory group are acutely aware of water supply problems, as they have seen many of their neighbors' wells go dry. The advisory group suggested that the EIS consultant take a more in-depth look at the water supply problem since it would potentially restrict development in the future, reduce the needed size of the plant, and jeopardize the cost-effectiveness of a regional system.

The advisory group ended its second meeting by requesting the EPA Public Participation Coordinator to delay the public hearing scheduled on the EIS until the advisory group could analyze and comment publicly on the information being developed by the EIS consultant. They requested that an agenda and pertinent materials be distributed in advance of the third meeting so that they would have better opportunity to prepare.

What Does Gettysburg Mean to You?

At the beginning of the second meeting the group was still struggling with “why are we here?” By the end of the meeting, they had made two significant recommendations. This was done even though the group had no officers, and was not sure of the expectations of the federal and state agencies. The group took the initiative and appears to have persuaded those involved to take a closer look at the complexities of overall planning for the municipal wastewater treatment facility. The group also requested an opportunity to analyze and comment on the EIS information being developed before a public hearing was held.

At future meetings the group will be reviewing, evaluating, and commenting on the information being developed for the EIS. Major areas of concern include:

- Where are the focal points of future growth in the Gettysburg area, and what implications will they have in regard to planning this water pollution control project?
- What are the alternatives, including innovative technologies and multiple use options, available for meeting the water quality goals?
- What are the needs of the community and what alternatives will be acceptable to the community?
- How can the concerns of the interested parties be addressed in a fair and equitable way?

During the third meeting, the group continued to review the progress of the environmental assessment being developed for the EIS. The group had recommendations as well as many questions for the consultant preparing the document. Although, it is still unknown whether the advisory group can help in achieving a more feasible wastewater treatment system, it is clear that they plan to ask worthwhile, but “sticky” questions. Such actions will likely enhance the coordination among agencies and clarify decisions made during the planning process. This atmosphere, alone, can be beneficial in helping to achieve a solution which is compatible with the goals of various agencies while meeting the needs of the community. It would appear that the group has now established its identity, has a definite idea about its role, and is ready to make a significant contribution to the water quality management planning and decision-making process.

Municipal Wastewater Management: Citizen's Guide to Facility Planning. FRD-6, Publication Number EPA-430/0-79-006. Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, February 1979. 263 pp.

**Need
More
Information?**

This handbook is designed to acquaint citizen leaders with important decisions that need to be made in managing municipal wastewater. The book lists key decision points throughout the planning process that are critical to the facility plan and the community; identifies environmental, economic and social considerations affecting these decisions; discusses citizen input, and helps citizens understand the legal tools to facilitate their involvement. It is a good reference book. It is available from General Services Administration (8FFS), Centralized Mailing Lists Service, Building 41, Denver Federal Center, Denver, CO 80225.

"Public Participation in Programs Under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Clean Water Act, Final Regulations, Title 40, Chapter 1, Part 25." *Federal Register*, Vol. 44, No. 34, Part V Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, February 16, 1979. pp. 10286-10297.

This document presents the rules and regulations for public participation including the Clean Water Act of 1977. It deals with advisory groups in detail, including both the responsibilities of the groups and the EPA.

"State and Local Assistance, Grants for Construction of Treatment Works, Title 40, Chapter 1, Part 35". *Federal Register*, Vol. 44, No. 23, Part VI, Washington, DC: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, February 16, 1979. pp. 10300-10304.

This document presents the rules and regulations for public involvement in the wastewater treatment Construction Grants Program.

Cost-Effectiveness Analysis—determination of whether a project or technique is worth funding; both monetary and nonmonetary factors are involved.

Environmental Impact

Statement—detailed analysis of potential environmental impacts of a proposed project. It is required when the EPA determines that a project may have significant adverse environmental effects or is highly controversial.

Infiltration—seepage of water into a sewer system through defective pipes and joints.

Liaison—a go-between to ensure concerted action between parties.

Step One Planning—initial planning stage for water pollution control facilities as administered through the Construction Grants Program.

Step Two Design Grant—the second stage of planning when a water pollution control alternative is designed as administered under the Construction Grant Program.