



Getting Started

Cultural Context: The History of Aboriginal Women in Canada

◆ Early History

Aboriginal women have a long and proud history. While differences existed from nation to nation and village to village, women had a strong voice in their communities, which was honoured and respected. Women held important roles in their communities such as caretakers, leaders (spiritual and civil), as well as nurturers; in many ways they were the lifeblood of their people.

The First Europeans who came to this land recognized the power that women held in their communities and often sought to undermine it in order to convert and conquer Canada's First Peoples. Among many nations it was the women in the community that spoke the loudest against the Europeans and their attempt at colonization. So a number of false images of Aboriginal women were created by the Europeans, which shaped colonialist assimilation policy and was implemented in the residential school system and the *Indian Act*.

◆ Residential Schools and the *Indian Act*



Figure 1: Female students at Shingwauk Residential School

The residential school system sought to remove Aboriginal children from their mothers and instill them with the values and religion of the dominant European culture. Governments at the time understood the importance of women in the continuation of culture and through the residential schools curriculum worked on eradicating the Aboriginal student's culture by instilling them with the Canadian culture. Throughout this process Aboriginal women were stripped of their former power and influence and disenfranchised.

Through the *Indian Act*, legislators also assaulted traditional gender roles by removing women from power, and robbed them of their status when women married non-Aboriginal men. Their children could not continue on with the status of the mother.



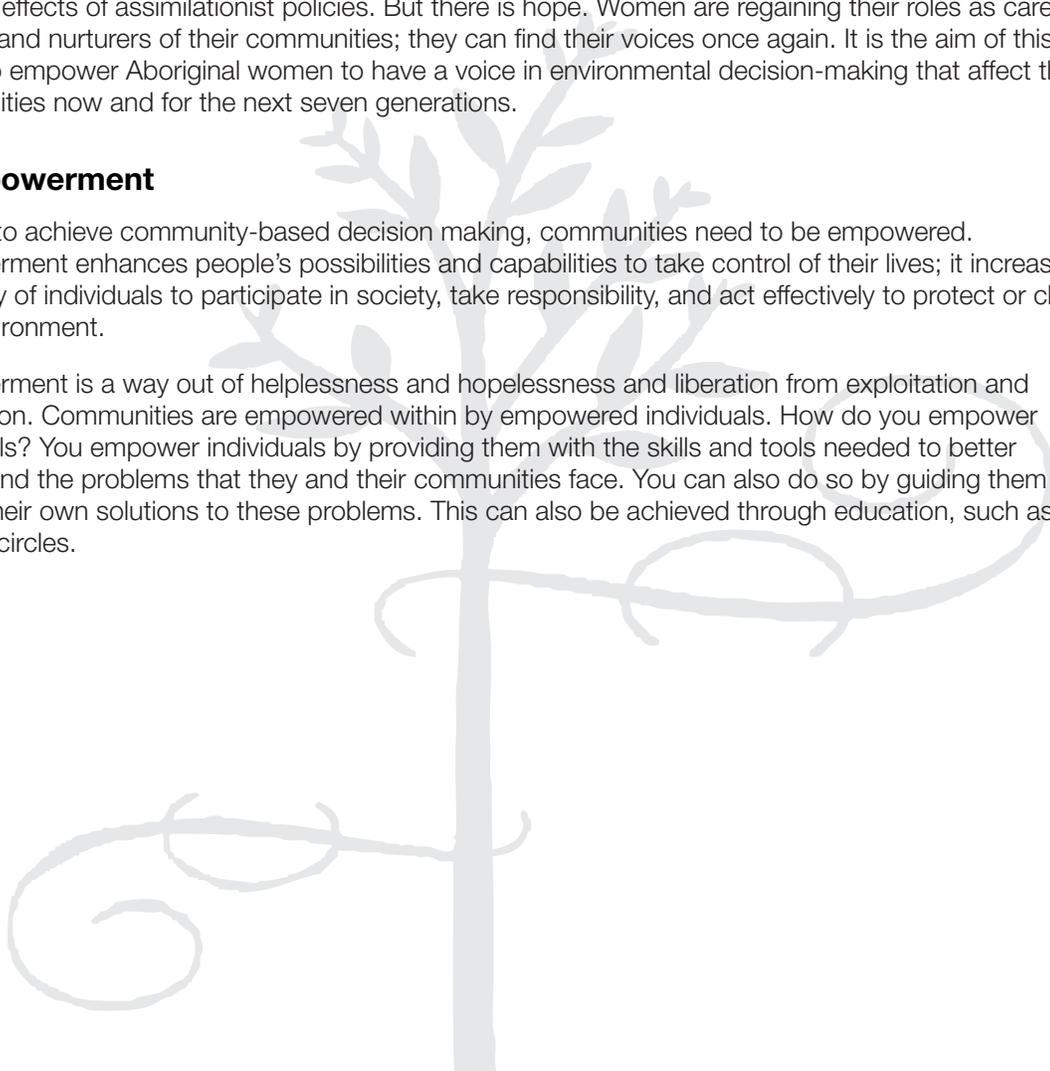
◆ **Moving Forward: Aboriginal Women Today**

Today women are reasserting themselves. Much of the power women once held in their communities has been lost. While the residential schools are closed and the *Indian Act* amended, there are still many lingering effects of assimilationist policies. But there is hope. Women are regaining their roles as caretakers, leaders, and nurturers of their communities; they can find their voices once again. It is the aim of this Toolkit to empower Aboriginal women to have a voice in environmental decision-making that affect their communities now and for the next seven generations.

◆ **Empowerment**

In order to achieve community-based decision making, communities need to be empowered. Empowerment enhances people's possibilities and capabilities to take control of their lives; it increases the ability of individuals to participate in society, take responsibility, and act effectively to protect or change their environment.

Empowerment is a way out of helplessness and hopelessness and liberation from exploitation and oppression. Communities are empowered within by empowered individuals. How do you empower individuals? You empower individuals by providing them with the skills and tools needed to better understand the problems that they and their communities face. You can also do so by guiding them in finding their own solutions to these problems. This can also be achieved through education, such as learning circles.



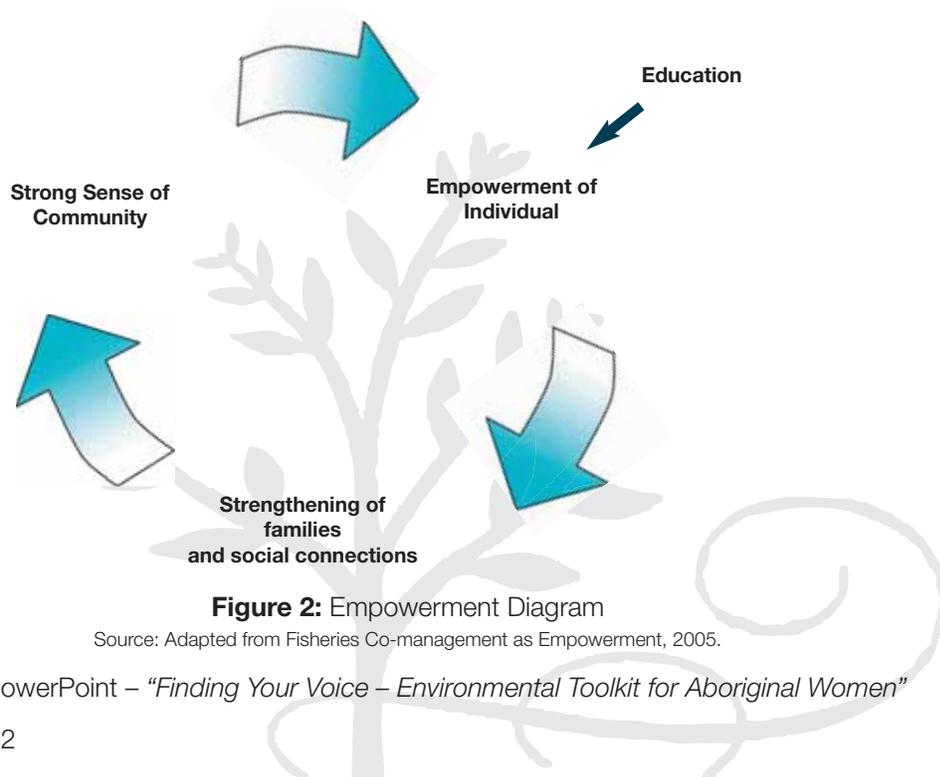


Figure 2: Empowerment Diagram

Source: Adapted from Fisheries Co-management as Empowerment, 2005.



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Suggestions:

How to Achieve Empowerment

- Get involved in your community! Host or attend community events such as:
 - Tree planting
 - Clean up of waterways
 - Traditional ceremonies – feasts, gatherings, Pow-Wows, sharing circles, sweats
 - Community gardening projects
 - Sports events
 - Fairs
 - Bazaars
 - Local school events
 - Any activity that builds community spirit and strengthens social networks
- Involve everyone regardless of their age or gender



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◆ Public Participation

What it is:

Public participation is vital to the environmental decision-making process. It ensures that the concerns and opinions of individual community members are heard and gives a voice to the community when dealing with developers, corporations, organizations, and governments. Public participation is a process where people share and exchange their knowledge and ideas on a subject. Keep in mind that ideas can differ greatly on any subject and that people may not all necessarily understand the issue at hand. People may also enter or leave the process at different stages depending on their availability and other reasons. In addition, public participation has the potential to influence decisions and solve problems. Successful participation builds and strengthens social networks within the community; it needs to be inclusive, respectful, flexible, and adaptive.



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When and How to Use it:

Public participation can be used in two different ways: proactively and reactively. It can be used to gain a greater understanding of the issues and problems that community members care about. Before problems arise it can be used to develop a vision for the community (*see the following section on Community Visioning for more information*). This would be considered as the proactive approach. After the fact, public participation can also be used in reaction to problems or issues that have arisen in your community. Both ways gather the opinions, suggestions, and solutions from the public to address issues of importance to them.

This Toolkit will be of assistance to you regarding one of the most common processes of public participation — the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process where companies or governments seek input from individuals at the community level on their proposed development projects in area.



◆ Goal

The goal of public participation is to empower communities and individuals with the ability to control their own futures. Continued involvement in public engagement processes is essential to ensure your voice is heard and to move beyond merely being informed or consulted. Full citizenship control over decision-making takes proactive planning and sustained involvement.



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◆ Successful Public Participation

In order to achieve successful public participation and achieve the goals of empowerment and control there are a number of key ingredients you will need:

- Mutual respect
- Equality
- Openness
- Inclusiveness
- Clear ground rules
- Addresses complaints and seeks a solution
- An exchange of information and mutual learning
 - One person cannot dominate, everyone must be allowed to share their ideas on the subject
- Flexibility and adaptability
 - If something does not work, try something else that may work
- Adequate time and resources
- Accessibility
 - Make sure the session is held in a place that everyone knows and can get to, including that there are things such as adequate parking spaces
- Allows for new participants to join in on participation process
- Allows many different ways for people to become involved
- Acceptable that there may be different points of view on issues



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◆ Benefits and Challenges

There are a number of positive benefits from engaging in the public participation process. These include the following points:

- Strengthening and empowering communities
- Increasing knowledge base
 - This usually comes from the sharing of knowledge among community members
- Helps make sense of complex problems being discussed or planned
 - More heads working on a problem are better than one
- Illuminates common goals and objectives on issue being discussed
- Allows you an opportunity to tell your story or point of view on a particular issue

There are also a number of challenges that you should be aware of that may pose difficulties when seeking successful participation from the public:

- Lack of participation
 - Members of the community may have little to no interest or ability to participate, decreasing the overall effectiveness of the public sessions
- Failure to make every effort to involve community members at the beginning of the public participation process
- Lack of shared decision making
 - No one seems to agree on the best way to move forward
- Lack of understanding of purpose (Why am I here? What good will it do me?)
- Ineffective, costly, and time consuming methods
 - Try to choose ways of engaging in public participation that are within everyone’s means (economically, socially, etc.), and that is agreeable to the community. Find out what process works best for your community
- Lack of understanding of information presented and/or poor communication
 - Everyone should be listening respectfully to every participant involved
 - Try to address the potential lack of resources for interested participants to become involved
 - Make sure that every participant has what they need to participate (examples: transportation, childcare, paper, pens, translation, etc.)



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- Fear of speaking out in front of the community
- Exhaustion
- Too many issues being brought before the community at one given time causes confusion, frustration and potential exhaustion which can lead to breakdown during communications.



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◆ **Some Ideas**

Public participation sessions can take many forms and should be tailored to fit the needs of the community. More formal public participation processes include workshops, community meetings, roundtables, brainstorming sessions, and learning or talking circles. Public participation does not need to be so formal, as it can involve likeminded community members that are interested in sharing ideas on how to address a potential issue. It can include meetings over coffee, tea, dessert, potluck lunches, or picnics; anything that brings together members of the community. Try to utilize new and innovative methods such as the internet to involve the community, especially the youth. Encourage community members to tell their stories and perspectives on issues while listening to points being shared. Also try to make the experience fun and educational for those involved. Be sure that this meeting time fits the schedule of women.



Suggestion:

- Workshops
- Learning and talking circles
- Brainstorming sessions
- Meetings over coffee/tea, dessert
- Potluck lunches or picnics
- Tupperware or candle parties
- Craft circles
- Door-to-door surveys
- Involve the youth through recreational events for example. Remember that they are the future and your decisions will affect them for years to come, therefore they too should have their say
- Utilize new media to engage younger community members. Examples include:
 - Facebook groups
 - Discussion forums/chat groups
 - Blogs



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- YouTube videos
- Forwarding informational e-mails

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gathering information
distributing information
problem solving
collaboration

Passive information					
advertisements		X			
news conferences		X			
websites	X	X			
technical reports		X			
newspaper		X			
television		X			
Indirect (non face-to-face)					
comment sheet	X				
toll free line	X				
internet submission	X				
survey	X				
Direct (face-to-face) active - general					
briefings		X			
hotline	X				
field office	X	X			
technical assistance		X			
contact person	X				
interviews	X				
Direct - small group					
PAC	X	X	X	X	
focus group	X	X			
workshop	X	X			X
design charette	X	X	X	X	
mediation and negotiation			X		
Direct - large					
open house	X	X			
deliberative polling	X				
Newer					
photo elicitation	X	X			
GIS	X	X			
visualization	X	X			

Table 1: Forms of Public Participation

Source: Adapted from: Public involvement in Environmental Assessment: The Case of the Nonparticipant. Environmental Management, 2002, and Public Participation in Sustainable Forest Management: A Reference Guide. Sustainable Forest Management Network, 2006.



◆ Community Visioning

What it is:

Community visioning is a mental picture of what community members want their community to look and feel like now and for the next seven generations. It is an effective planning tool that allows communities to determine their priorities early on and set goals in order to help guide their future. It considers a broad range of concerns and opportunities, identifies community capacity gaps/opportunities, and seeks active public participation. Its goal is to foster meaningful problem solving, action planning, and community consensus. To be successful it must include input from those in the community. Often included with this vision is an action plan – a detailed list of actions needed to accomplish the vision.



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How it is Created:

A community vision is created through public participation sessions. Community members come together to discuss key priorities and concerns. Below is a flowchart that shows the possible path that community visioning can take. Visioning can be as simple as a series of public participation sessions. However simple, this is a guide to further planning. The community visioning process should be designed to suit the immediate and/or future needs and budget of the community.

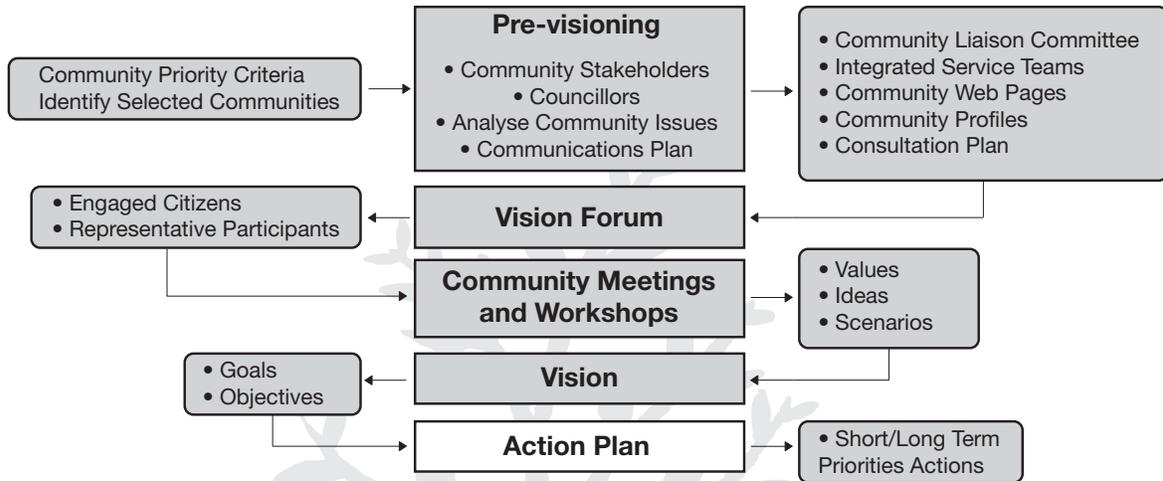


Figure 3 : Community Visioning Process



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Possible Areas of Consideration:

Community visions can encompass a wide variety of issues and concerns. Here are some possible issues to consider when creating a community vision:

- Need for community services and facilities
 - Community centres
 - Recreation facilities
 - Library
 - Schools
 - Youth services and activities
 - Drug and alcohol services
 - Family services
 - Health services
 - Services for Elders



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- Safety
- Housing
- Community pride and quality of life
 - Building quality
 - Community involvement
 - Cultural identity
 - Graffiti control
 - Noise control
- Transportation
 - Roads and highways
- Economic development
- Community boundaries
- Environment
 - Water quality and quantity
 - Energy needs and conservation methods
 - Conservation of plant and animal species (Example: Species at Risk)
 - Waste collection and treatment
 - Natural resource development



Suggestion:

Here are some resources for more information and examples of community visioning projects:

- Building Our Future: A Guide to Community Visioning
www.drs.wisc.edu/green/_documents/_community/Building%20Our%20Future%20-%20A%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Visioning.pdf.

Halifax Regional Municipality's Community Visioning Projects
www.halifax.ca/visionHRM/

Pacheedaht First Nation's Community Visioning Project
www.commongroundproject.ca/node/19



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- The City of Vancouver's Community Vision
www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/planning/cityplan/Visions/
- A sample of an American website
www.sustainable.org/creating/vision.html



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◆ **The Role of the Media in Environmental Decision-Making**

The news media can be an excellent research tool, providing concise and easy to understand summaries of complex environmental issues. Copies of current newspaper and magazine articles can be obtained from the internet or your local library. Some examples of useful media sources include:

- Local and national newspapers
- News, science, and nature magazines
- Local and national radio and television stations
- News services such as Canadian Press and Associated Press
- Specific newspaper and magazine websites:
 - www.ammsa.com/windspeaker/
 - www.aptn.ca
 - www.cbc.ca
 - www.ctv.ca
 - www.nationalpost.com
 - www.theglobeandmail.com
 - www.theturtleislandnews.com



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The media can also be a useful communication tool. It can be used to gain awareness of and support for issues your community may be facing. It can also be used to educate local community members on important issues and to advertise upcoming community meetings and public participation sessions. Local newspapers, radio, and television stations are particularly helpful in this regard. Get to know your local media contacts.

While the media can be a valuable source of information on environmental issues, it is also important to be critical and watch for bias and sensationalism. Some things to keep in mind when using the media as a research tool:

- Most newspapers, radio, and television stations are owned and operated as businesses to make money and are influenced by corporate agendas
- Media exists to sell itself, therefore it reflects what it thinks people want to hear, see and read
- Journalists are not without their own biases
- Both sides of the story need to be provided by media, but is not always reflected
- Television shows, radio programs and news articles are all edited for style, content, and space/time constraints
- Be sure to research issues from a number of different media sources to try to eliminate these biases and discover “the facts”



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◆ **Researching**

One of the first steps in decision-making is knowing more about an issue. This can be done in a number of ways. There are a number of free resources available through the work of Environmental Non-Government Organizations (eNGOs) as well as stewardship organizations. These groups are usually well informed of the local environmental and social conditions of an area and are always looking to involve community members. These can be good places to get information on an issue that is currently happening and to also find out what has been done in the past.



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Literature is readily accessible from these sources and is often free of charge. Organizations such as these may also have access to technical and professional experts in environment related fields which may be useful for clarification on certain issues.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) held by the people is a valued source of information within Aboriginal communities. Speaking to the Elders in your community may help to increase your education on an environmental issue. Elders may guide you to other resources or give you advice on how to approach community involvement on an environmental issue.

Internet resources which you may consider to use when researching environmental issues include:

- Canadian Environmental Network – www.cen-rce.org/eng/index.html
- Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) – www.cier.ca
- Dalhousie University – School for Resource and Environmental Management – sres.management.dal.ca
- Ecology Action Centre – www.ecologyaction.ca
- First Nations University of Canada – www.firstnationsuniversity.ca
- Lakehead University - Forestry and Environmental Science – www.lakeheadu.ca
- McMaster University – Environment and Health – www.mcmaster.ca
- National Aboriginal Forestry Association – nafaforestry.org
- National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association – www.nalma.ca
- Nova Scotia Environmental Network – www.nsen.ca/join.php
- Trent University – Environment and Resource Studies – www.trentu.ca
- University of Victoria – School of Environmental Studies – www.uvic.ca



◆ **Internet Search Engines Are Valuable Tools**

The internet is also a valuable searching tool. If you do not have access to a computer with internet, you may have the opportunity to access the internet in other places (Examples: at friends, families, your local public library, internet cafés, etc.).

(See Appendix A – Internet Researching)

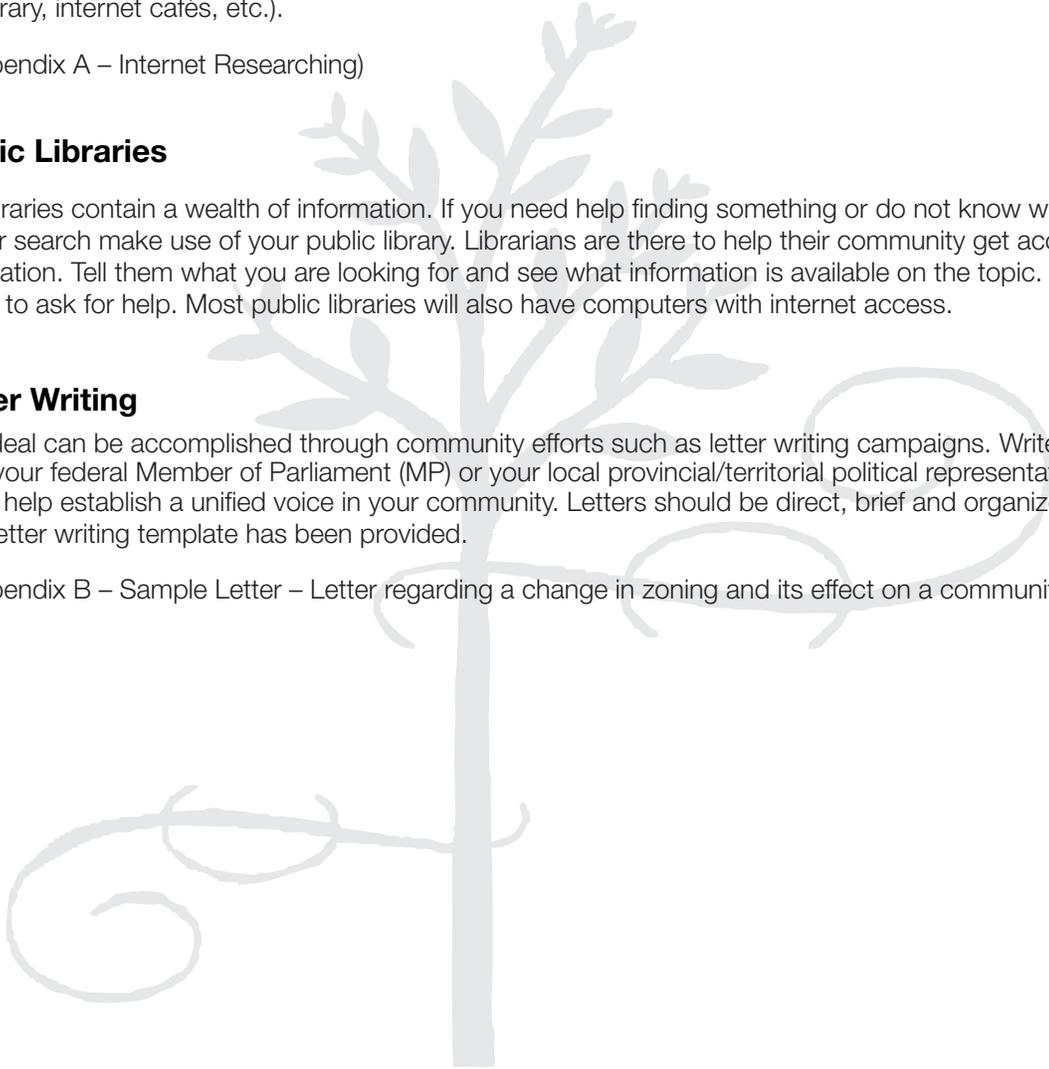
◆ **Public Libraries**

Public libraries contain a wealth of information. If you need help finding something or do not know where to start your search make use of your public library. Librarians are there to help their community get access to information. Tell them what you are looking for and see what information is available on the topic. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Most public libraries will also have computers with internet access.

◆ **Letter Writing**

A great deal can be accomplished through community efforts such as letter writing campaigns. Write a letter to your federal Member of Parliament (MP) or your local provincial/territorial political representative who can help establish a unified voice in your community. Letters should be direct, brief and organized. A general letter writing template has been provided.

(See Appendix B – Sample Letter – Letter regarding a change in zoning and its effect on a community)





◆ **Example of Letter Writing Template**

Your Name
Your Mailing Address
(2 spaces)

Date
(2 spaces)

Official's Name, Title
Full Mailing Address
(1 space)

Dear Sir or Madam _____:
(1 space)

Body of your letter should have several parts including the following:

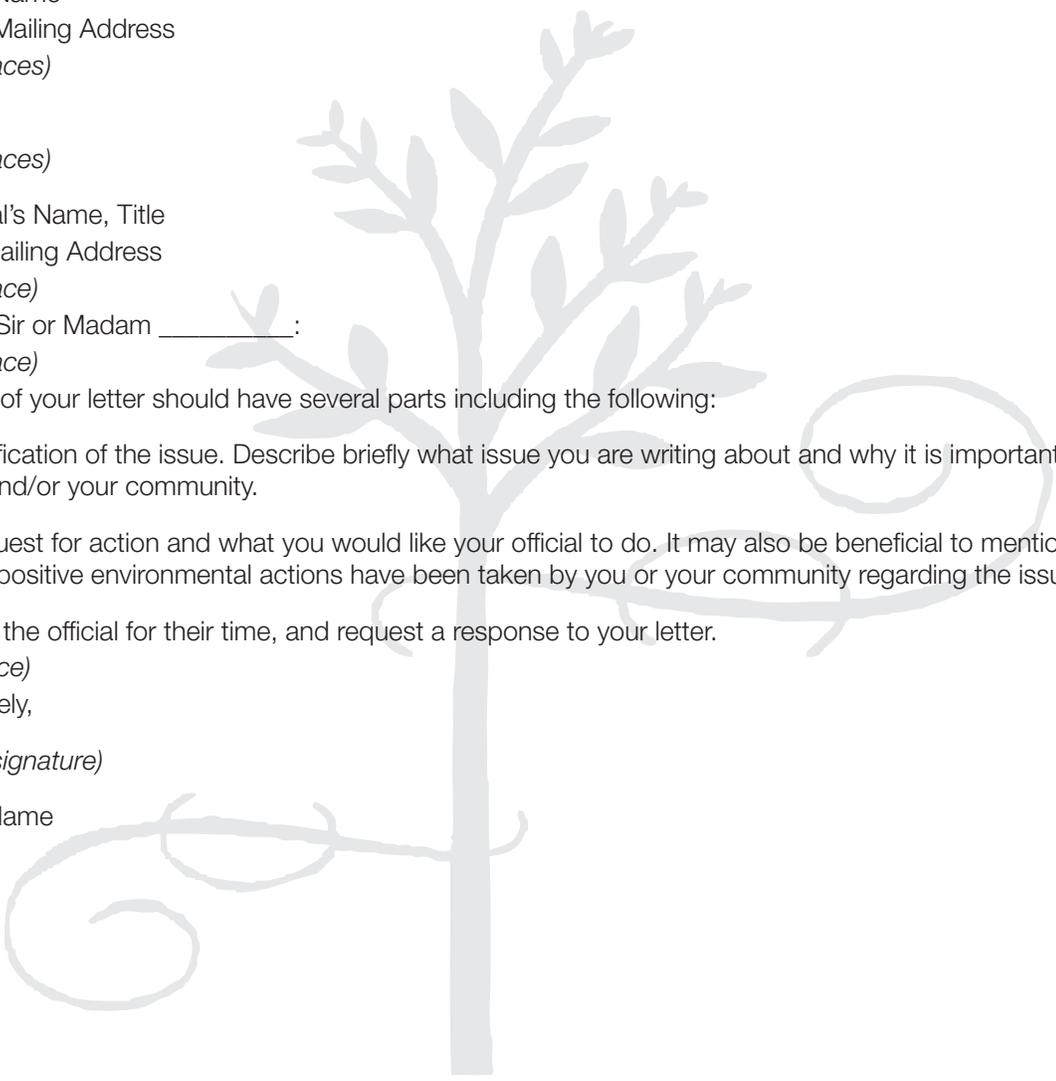
1. Identification of the issue. Describe briefly what issue you are writing about and why it is important to you and/or your community.
2. A request for action and what you would like your official to do. It may also be beneficial to mention what positive environmental actions have been taken by you or your community regarding the issue.

Thank the official for their time, and request a response to your letter.
(1 space)

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your Name





◆ **Successful Public Participation Handout**

What is it?

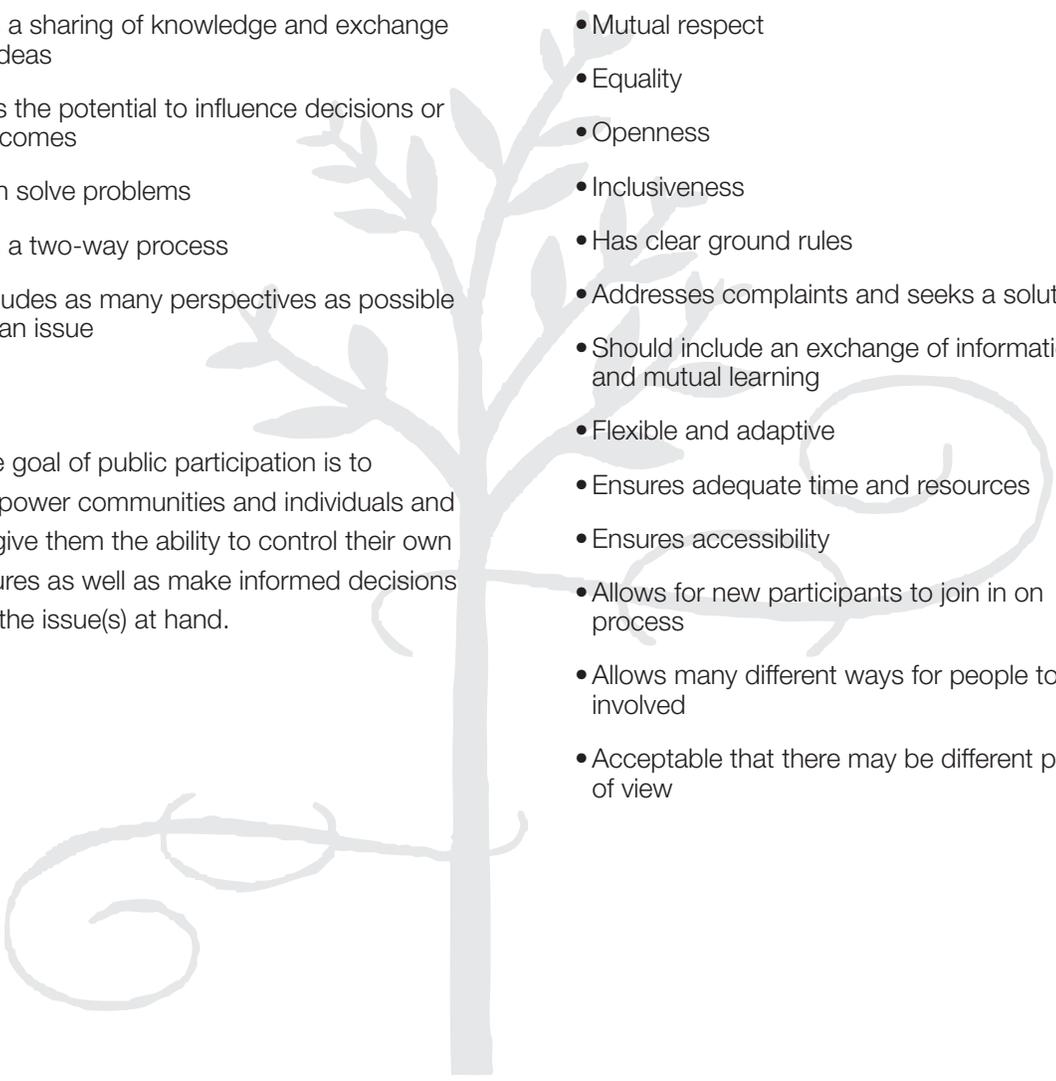
- It is a sharing of knowledge and exchange of ideas
- Has the potential to influence decisions or outcomes
- Can solve problems
- It is a two-way process
- Includes as many perspectives as possible on an issue

Goal

- The goal of public participation is to empower communities and individuals and to give them the ability to control their own futures as well as make informed decisions on the issue(s) at hand.

Key Ingredients

- Mutual respect
- Equality
- Openness
- Inclusiveness
- Has clear ground rules
- Addresses complaints and seeks a solution
- Should include an exchange of information and mutual learning
- Flexible and adaptive
- Ensures adequate time and resources
- Ensures accessibility
- Allows for new participants to join in on process
- Allows many different ways for people to be involved
- Acceptable that there may be different points of view



(Arnstein, 1969)



Benefits

- Strengthens and empowers communities
- Increases knowledge base
- Helps make sense of complex problems
- Illuminates common goals and objectives on issue
- Allows you an opportunity to tell your story

Possible Challenges

- Lack of participation
- Failure to make every effort to involve community members at the beginning of process
- Lack of shared decision making
- Lack of understanding of purpose (Why am I here? What good will it do me?)
- Ineffective, costly, and time consuming methods
- Lack of understanding of information and poor communication
- Lack of resources for interested participants
- Fear of speaking out in front of the community

Suggestions

- To overcome some of these challenges we need to be creative in how to get the community together
- Public participation can be anything where members of the community share and discuss ideas
- Make efforts to integrate the public participation process into any of the following community events:
 - Workshops
 - Learning and talking circles
 - Brainstorming sessions
 - Meetings over coffee/tea, dessert
 - Potluck lunches or picnics
 - Tupperware or candle parties
 - Craft circles
 - Door to door surveys
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 - YouTube videos

