

Guidelines for Reviews of Case Families

A major source of input into the study will be a set of analyses of “families” of public participation cases. These are separate processes that have significant elements in common (e.g., they address the same environmental issue in the same legal context, but in different locations). In order to improve the comparability of analyses across “case families,” the panel has prepared a draft set of guidelines for the authors of case family papers to use in their analyses

Rationale for the Case Family Approach

Most existing research on environmental public participation processes consists of reports or analyses of single processes (cases). While exceedingly useful for revealing the complexity of situations and of interactions among participants, individual case study research is limited in terms of developing generalizable knowledge about factors that affect outcomes across different types of participatory processes. It also has limitations with regard to comparing findings across studies and developing cumulative knowledge, because different studies examine different variables and define similar variables in different ways.

Recently, researchers seeking to develop a more general understanding of participatory processes have undertaken comparative studies aimed at building cumulative knowledge. These include studies that code preexisting case reports in common ways to enable multivariate statistical analysis (e.g., Beierle and Cayford, 2002) and others that collect original data on sets of related cases using common measures (e.g., the California watershed planning cases studied by Leach et al., 2002). However, problems remain. The first of these two approaches results in missing data wherever a case report lacks information on a variable of interest to the researcher building the database. It is also subject to criticism because there is no way to check for consistency between the findings as observed by the primary researchers and the interpretations made by the coders. The second approach does not have these limitations, but each of the available studies of this type is restricted to a single policy arena, so the approach cannot generate conclusions beyond that arena.

In this project, we want to combine features of these two approaches to get results that may be less subject to the above limitations. First, we are identifying several families of cases in different areas of environmental assessment and decision making. Second, in order to reduce problems associated with recoding of data by researchers at a remove from the original cases, we are asking researchers who have already worked on several cases in a family to reconsider their data (and sometimes to review research by others on different cases in the family). Third, to foster comparability across case families, we are asking authors to use a common format in presenting their analyses. Fourth, to promote theory development, we are focusing on a specific set of variables: four types of output or outcome variables and a larger number of variables and contextual factors that might affect the outputs or outcomes. Finally, in order to refine our preliminary specification of these variables, we will seek agreement with the case family authors in advance on the nature of the output/outcome variables and then ask each author to develop explanations of variation in the outputs/outcomes that are consistent with the range of cases they have examined.

The analysis will proceed at two levels. Each researcher will look within his or her case family and prepare a paper discussing and drawing conclusions about the outputs/outcomes of

public participation in that case family and the factors explaining the outcomes. Common definitions of the output/outcome variables will ensure some level of comparability across families. The papers will be presented and discussed in a workshop in late 2004 or early 2005.

At the second level, the project will move beyond single case families by comparing conclusions across families. In the workshop setting, the authors of case-family studies and invited participants will collectively try to identify conclusions that are robust across families and, for those that are not, will seek explanations of any apparent discrepancies by looking across families, with special attention to explanatory factors that are relatively constant within families but that vary across families in patterns that might explain the different conclusions across families. Workshop participants will also reflect on the possible broader applicability of insights that arise from specific case families but that were not addressed in papers on other families. To the extent that resources permit, the researchers and panel members will continue dialogue on these issues at a smaller subsequent meeting and by electronic communication. The panel will consider the papers, the discussion of the authors' conclusions, and other available evidence from beyond these papers in developing its recommendations for public participation practice and for future research.

To get to the present stage of the study, the panel reviewed important or representative examples from several key segments of the relevant research literature as indicated below:

- practitioner handbooks intended to provide experience-based guidance for the design and conduct of public participation processes
- empirical studies that examined five or more cases from a particular policy arena using a common method (e.g., watershed partnerships, Department of Energy weapons site clean-up advisory boards)
- recent literature reviews and secondary analyses of case studies
- recent works offering theoretical frameworks
- empirical studies involving fewer than five cases that addressed key process or outcome variables or examined processes different from the rest of the literature (e.g., Web-based dialogues)

A bibliography of studies reviewed appears at the end of this document, classified according to the above categories.

Considering these sources of insight, panel staff developed a general conceptual framework that formed a basis for discussion by the panel (see framework paper, Stern, 2003, attached). The panel has adopted the output/outcome variables from the framework as foci for analysis, but is not asking paper authors to adopt the framework's classification of potential causal influences, except as a stimulus for thinking.

Guidelines for Case-Family Studies

The following proposed guidelines are subject to modification through consultations among case family authors, panel members and staff, and other interested people.

Characterization of the Case Family

Each case-family paper should explain what makes the cases a family by identifying the key things they have in common. For example, do all the cases address the same environmental policy problem? If so, what is it? Are they all at the same level of decision making (e.g., local, national)? Do they all lead to the same kind of decision? Are they all managed by the same entity, or do they all inform decisions by the same entity (e.g., a common government agency)? Are they governed by a common set of laws or regulations? Do they all follow a common set of guidelines or traditions with regard to public participation?

To facilitate comparisons across case families, each paper should provide other background information on the family. It should characterize the official or generally understood *purpose* of the participatory processes. For example, these processes may be defined as (a) information-gathering activities or activities intended to set priorities for research and analysis, (b) advisory processes (e.g., assessing the nature of an environmental problem, seeking policy recommendations from scientists and affected parties, gathering information on the views of the public) or (c) collaborative or consensus-based process empowered to make decisions on the issues they are addressing. The paper should say something about the *context* in which the processes occur: the number of stakeholders typically involved, what is at stake in the decisions affected by these processes (e.g., the extent to which major threats to public health, strongly held values, or matters of equity are involved), the extent to which the environmental science issues are complex or controversial, the extent to which well-organized economic or political interests are involved, and the extent to which decisions affect groups of people who do not have the opportunity to speak effectively for themselves (e.g., children, low-income and minority communities, future generations). The paper should also indicate whether the cases in the family involve stand-alone decisions or are embedded in on-going consultative relationships, such as between an agency and the public. The author should make clear the extent to which members of the case family are uniform or diverse with respect to such matters. Finally, the paper should briefly characterize the data available on the case family.

Outputs and Outcomes

Public participation processes may be judged by a variety of kinds of results or effects. Each paper should consider the outputs and outcomes of its set of participatory processes in terms of four main output/outcome variables that many observers consider important:

- the quality of the output of the process, defined without reference to ultimate environmental or other outcomes;
- if appropriate for the case family, the quality of the environmental and other outcomes related to the decision objectives;
- the degree of acceptance or legitimacy of the output from the perspectives of those involved or affected; and
- the capability of those involved for making similar decisions in the future.

For each of these outputs or outcomes, each author should discuss how the cases in the family performed—not just on average, but especially in terms of variation among cases. A

focus on variation provides the basis for the central contribution of these papers: the author's explanation of why some of the participatory processes performed well against a certain output/outcome criterion while others performed relatively poorly. We would also like the author's assessment of the quality of data available about the performance of the participatory processes against each criterion and of the strength of the evidence in support of any explanations offered.

The following paragraphs describe our current understanding of each output/outcome variable and ways an author might go about assessing the performance of a process in terms of each output/outcome:

1. *Quality of output of the process:* Each case can be considered by assessing its output against a variety of "internal" quality criteria, that is, criteria defined without reference to the ultimate environmental or other outcomes beyond the process. Here are some questions one might ask in making such an assessment: To what extent did the process *achieve its intended objectives* (e.g., give the requested advice)? To what extent did the result of the participatory process (e.g., a decision, a recommendation, or an assessment) reflect *the best available information* about the relevant environmental phenomena? To what extent was it *responsive to the concerns expressed* in the participatory process? How accurately did it *reflect the values and interests at stake* in the assessment or decision? Among the possible indicators of quality of output are whether the process uncovered previous mistakes and whether scrutiny after the completion of the process uncovered important oversights or biases. When the output is a recommendation, it is also appropriate to ask: To what extent did the process make clear to decision makers the basis for the recommendation? How well did it clarify the degree of consensus on the environmental conditions and processes addressed in the recommendation and the nature and extent of disagreements that could not be resolved? When the output of a process is an environmental decision, it is appropriate to ask: How fully did the decision making process make use of the information that emerged from the public participation process?
2. *Quality of environmental and other outcomes.* When a participatory process leads to a policy decision, as in a regulatory negotiation, it makes sense to evaluate the process against actual environmental, social, and other outcomes as well as by internal criteria. One might do such an evaluation by comparing outcomes against the conditions that preceded the participatory process, those that had been predicted prior to the process, or those that might have occurred had the process yielded a different decision, consistent with the inputs.
3. *Legitimacy of the output and the process among interested and affected parties.* Because some participatory processes offer advice rather than make binding decisions, it is important in those cases to distinguish judgments of the process and its immediate output (e.g., advice) from judgments of the decision. A participant may be quite satisfied with a participatory process but angered by the ultimate decision, or vice versa. To assess legitimacy, one might ask for each party affected by the decision: How well did its representatives think the participatory process considered the facts and the values that needed to be considered? How reasonable did they judge the conclusion of the participatory process to be, considering the evidence? How much trust and respect did they have, at the end of the process, in each other and in the sponsoring organization? To what extent did they consider their input taken

seriously by other participants and the sponsor? How much conflict ensued when final decisions were announced? With a process that produced advice, one might ask the extent to which the decision maker who received the advice felt an obligation (beyond what might be legally prescribed) to follow it or to justify publicly a decision not to.

4. *Capability of the agency and the parties for making future similar decisions.* Performance against this criterion might be assessed by asking: To what extent did the parties affected by the decision, or their representatives, gain improved understanding of the state of scientific knowledge about the issues, including scientific uncertainty and disagreement? To what extent did they gain understanding of the values, beliefs, and perspectives of other parties? To what extent did they gain understanding of the constraints on the decision maker? Did the process establish smooth and generally accepted procedures that might easily be adopted in future processes? Did the process result in any changes in scientific analysis that might lead scientific information to become more relevant to future decisions? To what extent did the sponsor gain skill in managing participatory processes? Were any new institutional forms created in the sponsoring organization and in the affected parties that might more routinely handle related future decisions? Did the process result in implementation of monitoring systems, ongoing dialogue, or other methods for evaluating outcomes and modifying decisions in an adaptive manner?

Possible Explanatory Factors

Researchers on environmental public participation have proposed a large number of possible explanations for why participatory processes “succeed” or “fail” when judged against criteria such as suggested above. The conceptual framework paper (Stern, 2003) presents one effort to sort these factors into coherent categories. Based on that work, we offer the following list of possible explanatory factors for consideration in explaining variations in the outputs/outcomes of cases. The list is intended to be suggestive, in the sense of prodding thought. A case-family paper should offer the author’s best assessment of which explanatory factors—these or others, alone or in combination—best account for decision quality, legitimacy, capacity, and, where appropriate, environmental outcomes resulting from the public participation processes examined. Because of our focus on environmental subject matter and the importance of scientific information in that domain, we are especially interested in the ways participatory processes have incorporated scientific analysis (e.g., factors 5 and 6 below) and the effects of this aspect of participatory processes on the outputs/outcome variables.

1. *Representation of interested and affected parties:* Do all the interested and affected parties to the decision, including both organized interests and others, have a seat at the table? Do any parties complain about inadequate representation? To what extent do the parties—especially the least well-endowed ones—have the technical competence and other resources needed for meaningful participation? Are parties included that do not have a strongly expressed interest at present but that are likely to be affected in the future? To what extent was representation defined by interests (a stakeholder model) or in other ways? How much freedom did organizational representatives have to compromise and engage in developing new approaches?

2. *Preexisting relationships among the parties:* At the beginning of the process, what was the climate of relationships among the parties, in terms of such factors as cooperation, trust, conflict, etc.? What was the legacy of past interactions of the interested and affected parties with each other and with the decision-making agency or organization? What were the expectations of the parties regarding whether their presence or input would be welcomed by other parties or the official decision maker? You may wish to consider whether and how the process might have proceeded if interested and affected parties and the decision-making actor had had a different history.

3. *Intensiveness of deliberation.* How intensive was the deliberative process, in terms of frequency of interaction, the amount of time spent in interaction, or the degree to which issues are explored in depth? Generally, public hearings and surveys are not very intensive, and advisory committees and deliberative panels are more so. However, there may be considerable variation in intensiveness across different processes that are all defined in the same way (e.g., as advisory).

4. *Procedural quality of deliberation.* Are there aspects of the deliberative process that help foretell the quality or legitimacy of the outputs? Some such aspects might concern the emotional tone of the deliberations or efforts that were or were not made to ensure that voices were heard, information was considered, or values were made explicit. How much effort was made to surface and consider all the relevant information and the relevant perspectives on the information and the decision? How well were participants informed about rules, agendas, schedules, etc.? How clear were the lines of communication? How complete was communication among the parties? To what extent did the process allow the parties to ask questions of each other, of experts, and of the convening authority? How did the process allow for iteration and reconsideration? For integration of analysis and deliberation? To what extent did the process follow formal rules (e.g., Delphi, nominal group technique, citizen jury methods) or conventional or informal rules such as those of public hearings or advisory committees?

5. *Quality of scientific analysis.* From a decision science perspective, high-quality analysis might be indicated by affirmative answers to these questions: Did the process include analysis of all the kinds of consequences of significant concern to the parties? How well were these analyses done according to scientific standards (e.g., peer review)? What methods were used for summarizing and aggregating information and evaluating decision options and their consequences (e.g., benefit-cost analysis, risk analysis, simulations) and how well were they used? Was there formal evaluation of the distributions of costs and benefits among the interested and affected parties? Were uncertainties considered explicitly, and were analytic methods used to describe the uncertainties quantitatively where possible? Did the analysis explicitly identify important decision-relevant scientific issues on which knowledge is absent or on which important decision-relevant information is disputed?

6. *Quality of deliberation about the scientific analysis.* To assess the quality of deliberation about analysis, one might ask: How much opportunity did the parties have to request information from and raise questions with the analysts? To what extent did they participate in framing questions for analysis? in selecting the methods used to summarize information for their consideration? What opportunities existed for analysts and scientists who disagreed with each

other to explain their positions to the parties? To what extent did the process include discussion about how well the analysis considered the concerns and knowledge claims of nonscientist participants?

7. *Organizational factors within participating organizations.* What was the convening agency's commitment to the process and was that appropriate for the needs of the participatory process? To what extent was there management support for the process? What units of the agency were involved and how did they interact with other relevant units in the agency? What were the convening agency's taken-for-granted assumptions or routines regarding who is normally consulted during decision-making processes, how seriously to take input from certain interested and affected parties or from nonscientists, how best to conduct public participation, and what weight to give to the outcomes of such processes? Did institutional pressures from higher levels of government affect behavior at lower levels where the decisions are made? These same questions can also be asked about organizations that participated in but did not convene the process.

8. *Resource constraints.* To what extent did time and/or budget constraints for the convening organization affect how the process was conducted? How well was the organization prepared in terms of relevant scientific expertise and expertise in how to conduct a public participation process? How adequately had it invested in understanding the scientific issues and in the issues at stake for the affected parties? To what extent did resource limits affect power differentials among the participants? To what extent did such constraints raise issues of trust?

9. *Dynamics of the process.* Finally, we would like you to consider how the participatory processes unfolded over time. Were there events that necessitated changes in the deliberative approach? Did new risk/benefit information emerge over the course of the decision making process that necessitated a rethinking of options or environmental assessments or that brought new parties into the process? In the course of deliberations, did outside influences or entities affect the process? Did the pattern of participation and deliberation change over time (e.g., in breadth of participation or intensity of deliberation)? Did the individuals representing government agencies or organized interests change over the course of the process? Did interactions among involved parties evolve to become more or less adversarial over time?

Crafting the Papers

We want the papers collectively to inform a focused discussion that can cut across cases and environmental decision contexts and build an empirically supported general theory of participatory processes. Such a theory would transcend the particularities of specific agency rules and environmental systems by defining attributes of environmental decision making contexts that determine which processes and procedures are most likely to produce which kinds of outputs and outcomes. It would be useful for practitioners facing new situations that call for participatory processes and who want to use the best available knowledge to inform their efforts to design and implement the processes. It would also inform future efforts to evaluate participatory processes by identifying key dimensions that should be included in evaluations.

To advance these purposes, we are asking all the authors to organize their thinking (and perhaps structure their papers) around the above four output/outcome types, addressing the issue of which kinds and combinations of explanatory factors account for observed variation in each of the outputs/outcomes. This organization will enhance comparability and highlight convergences and divergences across the papers. It may require some authors to consider existing data in new ways or to conduct additional analysis of their own data. If the latter is necessary, we can discuss authors' situations individually. We would like to do as much as possible to see that each author addresses all the output/outcome types on the basis of the data.

In writing the papers, we ask the authors to rely strongly on the evidence, to be specific and explicit in assessing its quality and strength, and yet to strive to make their papers intelligible to non-academics who are interested in the subject.

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