CONDITIONS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

An appropriate organizational structure is needed to work through.
- Citizen participation can be facilitated with an appropriate organizational structure.
- Most citizens are only partially involved in a particular community interest area.
- Citizens will voluntarily participate in a community activity when they have an appropriate organizational structure available to them for expressing their interests.
- All community organizations will not get similar responses from citizens.
- Groups or organizations that exist over time develop behavior patterns that may or may not be conducive to open participation.

Citizen participation is greater when one’s “Way-of-Life” is threatened.
- Situations that threaten people’s life styles may elicit citizen participation.
- Whether people’s perceptions are accurate or inaccurate makes little difference.

Civic engagement requires obligation and commitment to work.
- Citizens frequently participate because they feel an obligation or commitment to respond.
- “Altruism is rarely sufficient by itself to sustain motivation for joining and remaining involved in volunteer associations.”

Good information and better knowledge are needed for effective participation.
- People are reluctant to participate in community activity when they do not have enough information to act responsibly.
- They simply do not know how to act.
- If forced, they will usually act negatively.
- People will act only after they have time to think about and discuss an issue.

It is better when people are more comfortable in a group.
- Citizens will voluntarily participate in a community activity when they feel comfortable in the group.
- Membership in voluntary associations is not a characteristic of most Americans.
Citizen participation can be better facilitated:
- By stressing the benefits to be gained.
- With an appropriate organizational structure available for expressing interest.
- By helping citizens find positive ways to respond when their way of life is threatened.
- By stressing the commitment or obligation each of us has toward improving the community.

Crisis situations have long been used as a successful basis for gaining citizen participation. The most positive of all approaches to facilitate greater participation is to provide citizens with better knowledge.

Citizens will voluntarily participate when they:
- See positive benefits to be gained
- Have an appropriate organizational structure
- See some aspect of their way of life threatened
- Feel committed to be supportive of the activity
- Have better knowledge of an issue

Citizen participation can be improved by:
- Stressing participation benefits
- Organizing or identifying appropriate groups receptive to citizen input
- Helping citizens find positive ways to respond to threatening situations
- Providing citizens with better knowledge on issues
- Helping participants feel comfortable

Membership building happens by:
- Publicizing issues and events
- Keeping people informed
- Making events fun
- Holding community meetings
- Involving the whole neighborhood; diversity matters!

Publicize issues and events
- The best way to recruit members is to "go public."
- Conduct a membership campaign or organizing drive in which volunteers distribute information door-to-door and personally invite people to join the community effort.
- Network through schools, churches and senior centers.

Keep people informed
- Recruiting new members is not the only reason to publicize group activities.
- It is important to keep long-standing members informed. (newsletters)
- Use a telephone tree or pyramid.