



Superfund Community Involvement Tools and Practices

This document provides an overview of the community involvement tools and practices that can be used to actively engage the public for multiple situations and issues. These methods can be adopted, combined, or reinvented, as needed, to address the specific needs of the community. The tools have been organized alphabetically.

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Each community involvement tool describes an activity or resource that a Superfund site team may use to involve and inform the community. Each tool begins with a brief overview and description of why

the activity is important (including whether or not it is required by law or regulation). The tool then moves into implementation and discussion about how and when that activity or resource can be used in the Superfund process. In many cases, the tools will reference related tools, and conclude with ‘Tips’ and ‘Attachments.’

More detailed information about each of these outreach and engagement tools can be found in the online [Superfund Community Involvement Toolkit](#). Each tool should be used in conjunction with the [Superfund Community Involvement Handbook](#), which provides guidance to EPA staff on how EPA typically plans and implements community involvement activities at Superfund sites. Both the Community Involvement Handbook and the Community Involvement Toolkit are available on [EPA’s website](#).

Community Advisory Groups

A Community Advisory Group (CAG) is a representative committee, task force, or board composed of community members and other stakeholders affected by the site. Working with a CAG allows the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to hear from an inclusive group of individuals representing all significant stakeholder groups within a community. CAGs also help ensure representation and participation of some populations that are disproportionately affected by environmental issues — such as minority and low-income populations — that may have been overlooked in past efforts to encourage public participation. CAGs can also facilitate the exchange of information, including the perspectives of community members with important institutional knowledge of site issues and practices. A CAG should represent the range of diverse views and perspectives of members of the community.





Community Interviews

Community interviews are conducted to gather information for a CIP or for a technical assistance needs assessment (TANA). These interviews are a way to meet with community members and learn about their site-related needs, concerns, and expectations, as well as how the community gets information and prefers to receive site-related information from EPA. Community interviews also can provide a valuable opportunity for the site team to explore community concerns in depth and build positive relationships with members of the community.

The National Contingency Plan (NCP) requires the Agency to “conduct community interviews with local officials, community residents, public interest groups, or other interested or affected parties, as appropriate, to solicit their concerns and information needs, and to learn how and when citizens would like to be involved in the Superfund process.”

Community Involvement Activities Throughout the Superfund Remedial Process

This graphic lays out required and recommended community involvement activities during the remedial process. It serves as a quick resource to ensure that you are meeting the required activities, while also listing recommended activities during each phase. The graphic also provides a visual as to when the various toolkit tools are most useful throughout the remedial process. *(This tool is intended to be printed on 11" x 17" paper.)*

Community Involvement Activities Throughout the Superfund Removal Process

This graphic lays out required and recommended community involvement activities during the removal process. It serves as a quick resource to ensure that you are meeting the required activities, while also listing recommended activities during each phase. The graphic also provides a visual as to when the various toolkit tools are most useful throughout the removal process. *(This tool is intended to be printed on 11" x 17" paper.)*

Community Involvement Plans

A community involvement plan (CIP) is a site-specific strategy to enable meaningful community involvement throughout the Superfund cleanup process. CIPs, which are required by the NCP, specify EPA-planned community involvement activities to help communities understand: (1) the Superfund cleanup process; (2) how, when, and where EPA will provide site-related information to the public; (3) how the public can be actively involved in the cleanup process; and (4) the key points in the cleanup process and the ways in which EPA takes public input into consideration during interim and final decisions. The CIP reflects community needs, concerns, and expectations that are identified through community interviews and other means.

The CIP is both a document and the culmination of a planning process. As such, the CIP provides the backbone of the community involvement program and serves as a useful resource that the site team often turns to during the Superfund cleanup for advice on appropriate activities for community involvement. The CIP should be revised and updated when site or community conditions significantly change from what EPA initially planned.

Community Profiles

The community profile is a narrative that describes the community affected by the Superfund site; summarizes demographic information; and identifies significant subgroups in the population, languages spoken, and other important characteristics of the affected community. It also should address whether the community might bear a disproportionate burden of exposure or environmental health effects due to race/ethnicity, national origin, or income compared to other communities (i.e., issues related to environmental justice). The community profile is an important element of the CIP, which is a required activity.

Communication Strategies

A communication strategy is a plan for providing information to specific audiences about a specific issue, event, or concern. A communication strategy serves as a blueprint for communicating effectively on a specific issue with the public, stakeholders, or even colleagues.



Generally, a communication strategy:

- Outlines the objectives or goals of the communication.
- Identifies key stakeholder groups and audiences and their concerns.
- Defines key messages to convey or key information to collect.
- Identifies potential communication methods and vehicles for communicating information for a specific purpose.
- Specifies how feedback on the strategy will be obtained.

Communication strategies do not have to be formal written documents. They can simply involve taking the time to think about a communication problem or issue and determining the best approach for communicating the message or information. However, at Superfund sites with high levels of public concern or site cleanup issues that are expected to be controversial, a more formal written strategy may be needed to ensure that all stakeholders are reached and all key messages are communicated effectively.

A communication strategy can be one component of a CIP, but it addresses only a specific event, issue, or concern, such as an emergency response to a release, or communicating the specific risk at a site.

Evaluating Community Involvement Activities

Evaluation is a key component of an effective community involvement program. Without concrete feedback, it can be difficult for a Superfund site team to know whether the CIP or other community involvement activities are working as anticipated. For this reason, it can be useful to solicit feedback and gather information that will help the site team evaluate how well each approach or activity is meeting its intended objective.

Fact Sheets

A fact sheet is a brief document that informs community members about site plans and activities or explains highly technical concepts in a way that can be easily understood by non-technical readers. Although the NCP only requires the preparation of a fact sheet in one instance, on the final engineering design, fact sheets are routinely used throughout the

Superfund process to inform the community about site activities.

Five-Year Reviews

EPA is required by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) to review remedies at Superfund sites where waste is left on-site at concentrations that do not allow unlimited use and unrestricted exposure. The purpose of the five-year review is to evaluate the implementation and performance of a remedy to determine whether the remedy is protective of human health and the environment or will be when complete. Reviews may be conducted more frequently to ensure protectiveness of the remedy. Community involvement is an important part of the five-year review process. At a minimum, EPA's [*Comprehensive Five-Year Review Guidance*](#), recommends notifying the community that the five-year review will be conducted, notifying the community that the five-year review has been completed, and providing the results of the review to the local site repository.

Going Door to Door

Going door to door allows the site team to convey or obtain information from community members. Community Involvement Coordinators (CIC) may go door to door to inform residents about a nearby cleanup; distribute information; obtain access agreements to sample indoor air quality or collect drinking water or soil samples; or conduct informal community interviews to better understand the community's point of view on the site. CICs also may visit commercial properties and businesses to make them aware of site-related issues that may affect business operations.

Information Repository

An information repository is a record storage area at or near a Superfund site that contains all correspondence, reports, and documents pertaining to the site, the Administrative Record, or the Superfund program in general. At an information repository, people can research the site and applicable laws, learn how to participate in the cleanup process, and copy any information found at the repository. The information repository should be established early in the response action, be accessible to the public, and must be maintained throughout the Superfund process. Many repositories have been established



in local libraries or government buildings. The NCP requires that at least one repository be established at or near the location of the response action. One must be set up at all remedial and long-term removal sites. The NCP also requires that a repository have a photocopying machine available for public use. In addition, the Agency must inform the public of the establishment of the information repository. In 2013, the NCP was amended to allow for the establishment of electronic information repositories instead of or in addition to traditional repositories, if the lead agency at a site felt that the electronic resources would be more useful to the community.

Mailing Lists

A mailing list contains contact information for sending site-related updates to interested parties, either by mail or email. Contact lists are usually created in an electronic format, such as a database, which allows for sorting on any field, and is easy to update and expand. Information in contact lists usually includes name, address, phone number, and email address. Additional fields can be added as necessary. Databases can quickly produce mailing labels or email lists. An organized and updated contact list that encompasses the entire community can play an important role in communicating with the community.

Media Relations

Maintaining media relations is a good tactic to ensure accurate and positive coverage of the site. Until relatively recently, working with news media at a Superfund site meant identifying the major print, television and radio outlets serving the area and working with reporters to deliver site-related news and information. Today the media landscape is very different, as digital technologies and social media continue to change the ways in which people receive and share information. The news media is key in reaching a large audience quickly. Today, it is important to use all types of media — the traditional news media as well as social media and other forms of digital communication — to reach out to communities at Superfund sites. Knowing the most effective ways to use the news media in the context of this new environment is important to success.

Unless you are submitting an advertisement or public service announcement, the news media decides what

it will cover and how the story will be presented to the audience. The key to effectively working with the news media is to develop and use carefully defined messages and to repeat those messages. Establishing a good working relationship with news outlets and thoughtfully planning interactions with them greatly increases the likelihood that messages will be presented to the public in a positive or neutral manner. To do this effectively, learn how each medium gathers and presents news and understand the different needs of radio, television, and print media.

Public Availabilities/Poster Sessions

Poster sessions and public availabilities are unstructured forums for sharing information and answering questions. Poster sessions are informal exhibits presenting information in graphics and text by an expert who is available to discuss the topic specified on the poster. Public availabilities follow the same format as poster sessions, but without the posters. In availability sessions, site team members or other EPA experts are placed throughout a room and are available to discuss issues and respond to questions either one-on-one or in small groups. Public availabilities and poster sessions are useful when there is a great deal of compartmentalized information that needs to be presented in detail. They also are good for covering special topics that are generating, or are likely to generate, concern among residents and allow residents to speak freely with EPA personnel on a one-on-one basis. They can be planned as an individual event or held in conjunction with other outreach events. Several regional site teams have had success holding poster or availability sessions either prior to or after a public meeting.

Public Comment Periods

The public comment period is a prescribed time during which EPA accepts formal comments from the public on proposed actions and decisions. Public comment periods are required by CERCLA and the NCP at specific times to allow a “reasonable opportunity for submission of written and oral comments.” Most comment periods in the Superfund process typically are 30 days in length, but can be extended. Public comment periods enable citizens to participate in and contribute to the administrative decision-making process.



Public Meetings

A public meeting is a structured, formal meeting that is open to the general public. The purpose of a public meeting generally is to present information to the audience and to receive information from the community. A public meeting typically includes presentations from EPA and an opportunity for the public to interact with the site team.

The NCP requires public meetings as a means for the lead agency to receive comments from the public at specific points in the Superfund process. However, some Regions also hold public meetings that are discretionary. These public meetings generally are scheduled for other purposes, such as announcing important activities or discussing progress at the site.

Public Notices

Public notices are used to share information about important announcements or to provide the public with information about important milestones, events, and opportunities for participation in the Superfund process. Public notices may be published in local newspapers, broadcast on local radio, sent as mailings, posted on community websites or social media pages, or communicated to the public in other ways. Public notices are most effective when they present a simple, clear message and are placed in a conspicuous place within the newspaper. The NCP requires public notices at different stages of both the removal and remedial process.

Residential Relocations

EPA may decide to relocate individuals and families from their homes temporarily or permanently when their health is threatened or residences must be razed for remedial action to be effective. When EPA determines that a relocation is necessary, that relocation must be carried out in a timely fashion, and in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970. Information on EPA policy regarding temporary and permanent residential relocation, and tools for implementation, can be found on [EPA's Superfund Relocation Information website](#). Given that relocation is a complicated process that can cause personal and social disruption and stress, community involvement must be done early and frequently throughout the

relocation process. When a permanent relocation is considered, communities may want to use a relocation expert or advisor to provide independent assistance to the residents and businesses. A relocation expert may be accessed through the TAG or TASC programs.

Reuse and Redevelopment Planning

Superfund reuse and redevelopment are important components of EPA's commitment to returning formerly contaminated sites to sustainable and productive use. Reuse planning supports this commitment by bringing communities together with EPA to identify opportunities to strengthen site cleanups, build partnerships and enable meaningful reuse outcomes. Reuse planning is a community-based process undertaken in close coordination with EPA. The key steps include:

- Identifying process and reuse goals, ground rules and decision-making.
- Gathering and analyzing site and community information.
- Developing reuse scenarios that can range from commercial, industrial and residential land uses to sports fields, parks and wildlife habitat.
- Seeking out public input and refining reuse plans.

For those communities that may need some type of technical assistance, EPA can provide independent technical advisors through its Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) and Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) programs and also offer conflict resolution and mediation assistance through EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (CPRC).

Risk Communication

Risk communication is a two-way dialogue — an interactive process of information exchange — among the site team and the community about the nature of risk and how to manage it. This dialogue should be a genuine and sincere conversation that aims to identify mutual solutions and respond to public concerns. Effective risk communication is one of the key considerations identified in the [Superfund Community Involvement Handbook](#). Site teams should strive for effective risk communication throughout the Superfund cleanup process.





The goal of risk communication is to increase involvement of the community in the cleanup process, the Agency's awareness of the community's perception of site-related risks, and the public's understanding of how the Agency uses risk assessment in decision-making at a site. All members of the site team should be involved in risk communication and factor risk communication efforts in all community involvement actions, primarily to ensure the risk communication information is reinforced and not contradicted in all the various community involvement activities conducted at a site.

Social Media

EPA defines social media as any online tool or application that goes beyond simply providing information, instead allowing collaboration, interaction and sharing. Examples of social media include blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing, podcasts, social networking, social news, web conferencing and webcasting. Such tools allow EPA to reach out to people who may not engage the government in more formal, traditional ways. The Agency is using social media tools to create a more effective and transparent government, to engage the public and EPA's partners, and to facilitate collaboration. EPA employees may only use tools for which EPA has agreements or licenses with social media vendors.

Summary of Technical Assistance

Technical assistance refers to the provision of services focused on increasing community understanding of the science, regulations and policy related to environmental issues and EPA actions at Superfund sites. To support healthy communities and strengthen environmental protection, EPA works closely with communities and provides technical assistance services to enable community members to better understand local environmental issues and participate in decision-making at Superfund sites. This tool briefly summarizes eight technical assistance resources: Technical Assistance Needs Assessment, Technical Assistance Grant, Technical Assistance Services for Communities, Conflict Prevention and Resolution

Center, Partners in Technical Assistance Program, Technical Assistance Plan, Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units, and Technical Assistance for Public Participation.

Technical Assistance Grant

A TAG provides funding to community groups to contract with an independent technical advisor who can interpret and explain technical reports, site conditions, and EPA's proposed cleanup and other decisions to the community. In addition to site-related technical information, the technical advisor can help the community understand site-related public health, redevelopment, and relocation issues, under certain circumstances. The independent technical advisor also may help the community voice its concerns and preferences on site issues so it can participate substantively in site decisions. Only communities affected by a National Priorities List (NPL) site or a site proposed for the NPL, where a response action under CERCLA is underway, are eligible to receive a TAG. Initial awards of up to \$50,000 per site are available.

Technical Assistance Need Assessment

The TANA is a site-specific process to identify whether a community requires additional support from EPA in order to understand technical information and enable meaningful community involvement in the Superfund decision-making process. Members of the community are interviewed in order to get their views on how the community is receiving technical information about a site; whether the community needs additional assistance in order to understand and respond to site-related technical information; and whether there are organizations in the community that are capable of acting as an appropriate conduit for technical assistance services to the affected community. The TANA process produces a blueprint for designing a coordinated effort to meet the community's needs for additional technical assistance while minimizing the overlap of services provided by the site team, external partners, and EPA grants and contracts.