

## **Chapter 2. INVOLVING PEOPLE FACE-TO-FACE THROUGH MEETINGS**

Meetings—formal and informal—are the backbone of a public participation program. People like and need firsthand opportunities to discuss agency programs and plans.

### **Why are meetings important?**

Meetings provide a time and place for face-to-face contact and two-way communication—dynamic components of public involvement that help break down barriers between people and the agencies that serve them. Through meetings, people learn that an agency is not a faceless, uncaring bureaucracy and that the individuals in charge are real people. Meetings give agencies a chance to respond directly to comments and dispel rumors or misinformation.

Far from being passive gatherings, meetings are interactive occasions when people discuss issues of consequence to them and their neighbors, listen to opposing viewpoints on the issues, and work together for the common good. Agency staff people who handle public meetings need to be trained in skills that encourage interaction and also keep the process focused and productive.

### **Do agencies have options in organizing meetings?**

The particular circumstances of a plan or project determine the type of meeting that is appropriate, when it is held, the way it is organized, and how it is conducted. Most meetings work best when they are adapted to a specific purpose—for instance, for stakeholders in a proposed project or plan to monitor its progress and effects, or for an agency to build consensus and support. Because they demand time and effort from all participants, meetings must be planned and implemented carefully. Options for organizing meetings are described on the following pages:

- A. Determining the type of meeting;**
- B. Selecting an organizing feature for a meeting; and**
- C. Taking initial action steps.**