1. Informing People Through Outreach and Organization

1.A - Bringing a Core Participation Group Together
1.B - Community-Based Organizations
1.B.a - Community-Based Organizations
1.B.b - Civic Advisory Committees
1.B.c - Citizens on Decision and Policy Boards
1.B.d - Collaborative Task Forces
1.C - Planning Assistant Tool
1.D - Index of Techniques

1.B.b - Civic Advisory Committees

What is a civic advisory committee?

A civic advisory committee is a representative group of stakeholders that meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern. While these groups are often called advisory committees, the term civic is used here, since citizenship is not a requirement for participation. Civic advisory committees (CACs) have been used for many years and are not in themselves innovative, yet they can be used very creatively. For example, a CAC was used in Louisiana to find consensus on environmental issues for input to public agencies. In California, a CAC advised on designs for deployment of a traffic information system.

Representation of agencies on a CAC is highly desirable as a means of interaction between local residents and their government. For example, in Portland, Maine, a CAC developed a long-range transportation plan with agency help. Because it can be used either alone or in conjunction with other techniques, a CAC is widely used to achieve a level of local input to transportation planning and development.

A CAC has these basic features:

- Interest groups from throughout a State or region are represented;
- Meetings are held regularly;
- Comments and points of view of participants are recorded;
- Consensus on issues is sought but not required; and
- A CAC is assigned an important role in the process.

Why is it useful?

A CAC is a forum for hearing peoples' ideas. It is a place where agencies present their goals and proposed programs. It provides a continuing forum for bringing peoples' ideas into the process and a known opportunity for people to participate. In the San Francisco Bay area, special efforts have been made to include representatives of disabled residents and including people who speak languages other than English.
A CAC molds participants into a working group. It is democratic and represent opposing points of view, with equal status for each participant in presenting and de views and in being heard. It is a place for finding out stances of participants on iss. place where people become educated on technical issues, over several meetings if i It gives a better understanding of the effort and milestones of public agency progre members feel freer to ask agencies for assistance, clarification of points, and follow-questions.

Does a CAC have special uses?

A CAC demonstrates commitment to participation. Its existence demonstrates toward involving people in projects and programs. It helps find common ground for about a solution. If consensus cannot be reached, a CAC provides a forum for identi positions, exploring them in depth and reporting the divergences of opinion to the a

A CAC is flexible. It can be part of regional or State planning or of a single project community participants’ assistance in anticipating construction and identifying meas reduce potential disruption. It can be subdivided. In the St. Louis area, three CACs formed to develop the regional long-range plan.

Who participates? And how?

Representatives of community groups or stakeholders are selected in one of ! 1) an agency carefully identifies all stakeholders, including the general public; and 2) public self-selects CAC memberships; i.e., those who are interested attend. If meml not fully representative, an agency should encourage groups not represented to att their input in some other way. San Francisco County Transit Authority appoints 11 ( members, drawing upon a pool of self-selected candidates who submit resumes. Pe attend meetings are asked if they would like to be considered for CAC membership. appointing members, the Authority proactively seeks diversity and balance of repres by race, gender, neighborhood activists, business interests, the disability communit proponents, et al. The CAC is used as a sounding board by the Authority on a wide transportation issues.

Diversity in viewpoints is a plus, to ensure full discussion. Though no special required, attendees typically have a broad, long-term view in discussing issues with geographic area—not a specific, single project. In many areas, such as the San Francisco area, agencies make targeted efforts to involve freight interests.

People participate by examining and discussing issues with others. Mailings meeting help participants understand issues and form questions. Major points of dis typically recorded; in some instances substantial detail on issues is desirable.

How do agencies use the output?

A CAC helps monitor community reactions to agency policy, proposals, and pro Observing interactions at the periodic sessions of a CAC, agencies become aware of and stances at an early point in the process—often before they become solidified or modify. Working with a CAC, an agency crafts compromise positions through give-a and over a relatively short period of time. For example, in Pennsylvania a CAC help determine the extent to which a highway project would affect a rapidly developing a Pocono Mountains.

Who leads a CAC?

A CAC elects its own leader. Dynamic and firm community leadership is effective enlivening a CAC. In Chatham County–Savannah, Georgia, a charismatic leader stre the CAC’s role in planning. Typically, CAC members select a leader who can deal wit
in an open and friendly manner and who is sensitive to group dynamics and able to lead the discussion and draw opinions and positions from participants.

**What does a CAC cost?**

A CAC requires support staff within an agency, and the work can be substantial. Minutes must be taken. Background information, minutes, and agendas must be sent out before meetings. A site for the meeting must be selected. Agency representatives need to provide resources for CAC questions and response preparation. A CAC may want a special meeting on transportation's role in the community, as was done in Pittsburgh. Additional assistance may be required in some instances. For example, in Washington CAC led by a facilitator helped plan a highway bypass on the Olympic peninsula.

Material needs are minimal, but a quiet meeting room is essential. Written materials may be needed at hand to supplement or give depth to the notes mailed prior to the meeting. In many cases, an agency needs to carefully explain its position or analysis, requiring materials at hand.

**How is a CAC organized?**

Ideally, a CAC has limits on its size to encourage discussion. However, flexibility is needed. Rigid limits exclude people who could provide valuable input; they also discourage participation. An overall size limit is undesirable, a large CAC can be divided into smaller groups, but this curtails interaction among interests. Recognizing this, a CAC and the agency should investigate overcoming these limitations through other means. For example, conferences can be used to expose CAC members to interaction with interests not represented on the CAC.

A CAC usually has officers, with a chairperson or director, an assistant director to chair meetings in the absence of the chairperson, and a secretary to record minutes (this person is sometimes on an agency staff). Elected officers may serve for a year or more.

CAC meetings are managed by the elected officers with assistance from agency staff. Formal parliamentary procedures, if oriented toward voting, are less useful than informal rules and consensus-building techniques. Meetings are usually held on a regular basis.

Pre-meetings help plan the regular sessions and draft policy goals. CAC officers and agency staff work together to bring substantive issues before the larger group. Subcommittees are established to explore details of issues, with meetings held between the regular sessions of the CAC.

A typical CAC agenda covers the following items:

- Introductions, if attendees vary each time;
- Welcome to newcomers;
- Discussion of agenda, seeking potential changes;
- Discussion of items on agenda in order unless change is requested;
- Presentations of information as necessary for clarification; and
- Determination of whether a consensus on each issue exists.

**How is a CAC used with other techniques?**

An established CAC is a forum for many public involvement techniques. A CAC can use brainstorming to establish consensus on a project. (See Brainstorming.) Frequently an outside specialist is used within a CAC to establish or resolve a particular or press
problem. (See Facilitation.) A CAC uses the visioning technique to establish long-range goals. (See Visioning.) A CAC should be able to consider the special issues of people with disabilities. (See People with Disabilities.) Video techniques can illustrate specific points. (See Video Techniques.)

What are the drawbacks?

**A CAC can seem to be manipulated by an agency** unless information from governmental sources is fully shared. The CAC may feel it is outclassed or overwhelmed by technical information if care is not taken by agencies to explain essential facts or features. In cases, a CAC may become inactive.

**A CAC is most useful on a project or regional scale.** A statewide CAC or one for a very large region can be unwieldy when a large number of people are involved and travel required of both staff and participants. A CAC’s effectiveness depends on being able to decide on the issues in an efficient and fair manner. Thus, effective leadership is important.

**A CAC does not encompass all points of view.** By virtue of being representative, a CAC’s voice may be skewed if it does not represent all stakeholders, including the general public. It may be difficult to represent minority interests.

**Opponents may refuse to consider each other’s ideas.** People who feel they are being controlled or patronized may withdraw from full participation. Agency staff members that the process is leading nowhere may not respond appropriately to questions from participants.

For further information:

- Chatham County–Savannah, Georgia (912)
- E–W Gateway Coordinating Council, St. Louis, Missouri (314)
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission, San Francisco Bay area (510)
- Phoenix, Arizona, Regional Transportation Authority (602)
- Portland, Maine, Area Comprehensive Transportation Committee (207)
- San Francisco County Transit Authority (415)
- Southwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission, Pittsburgh (412)