

Organizing for Public Engagement under the 2012 Planning Rule

Lessons Learned

Executive Summary

In 2012, the U.S. Forest Service released a new Planning Rule designed to guide National Forests and Grasslands (forests) as they revise or amend their land management plans. One of the eight purposes and needs of the 2012 Planning Rule is “...to provide for a transparent, collaborative process that allows effective public participation”.¹

Collectively, the U.S. Forest Service National Collaboration Cadre (Collaboration Cadre)² members have worked with more forests in organizing for public engagement under the 2012 planning rule than any other entity (total of 11 at this point). In doing so, Collaboration Cadre members have learned a number of “lessons” related to public engagement.

This document presents those lessons. Reflecting on the lessons learned from this experience³ provides useful information for forests yet to begin plan revision. The lessons shared here highlight key considerations for organizing successful forest planning public engagement.

Although the lessons learned fit across multiple categories of planning for public engagement, this document presents sixteen lessons organized according to the following three themes:

- Theme One:** Communicate Effectively (pgs 3-7)
- Theme Two:** Utilize Personnel and Staffing Resources Productively (pgs 8-11)
- Theme Three:** Devote Time and Attention to Logistics and Design (pgs 12-13)

The intended audience is the interdisciplinary team (ID team) and others focused on organizing public engagement for plan revision. Many of the lessons identified are not new, yet can be easily overlooked considering the long list of tasks associated with plan revision. The purpose of this document is to highlight the key lessons learned from other forests’ experiences.

¹ 36 CFR Part 219

² The Collaboration Cadre provides coaching and training assistance to National Forests, their communities, and interested stakeholders to help them engage in meaningful public participation and effective collaboration.

³ This includes the Collaboration Cadre’s collective experiences and individual member’s interactions and knowledge of other forests’ 2012 plan revision efforts. In addition, we included resources developed by other Forest Service personnel.

Introduction

Working to “...provide for a transparent, collaborative process that allows effective public participation” is an admirable goal. However, it is not easily achieved given the scope, complexity, and duration of land management planning.

Successful public engagement and collaboration requires an investment of time and resources. Planning events, developing channels of communication, and building relationships always takes more time than you expect. Being thoughtful, prepared, and organized at the beginning of plan revision will yield benefits throughout the multi-phase, multi-year planning process.

There are no silver bullets that will make meaningful public engagement simple: there is no step-by-step formula, no perfect meeting format, no ideal PowerPoint presentation, and no public participation strategy guaranteed to capture everyone’s attention. Your efforts can be informed by the experience of others, but in the end it will be your openness to new ideas, your persistent communication, and your commitment to authentic engagement that will determine the outcome.

It is undeniably true that every situation is different and demands a unique strategy. That being said, the Cadre’s experience is that there are some broader lessons to be learned by stepping back from the variation in detail and looking for larger trends or themes. These “lessons learned” are intended to provide forests important insight and best practices to consider as they embark on plan revision and develop a successful public engagement strategy.

1 Theme One: Communicate Effectively

Lesson 1 - Creative collaborative engagement takes thinking outside the box and using new outreach techniques and ideas.

Take the time to ask the people or groups you are trying to involve how they would like to be contacted and engaged. Ask local leaders to participate and encourage them to engage their associated community groups. They know how best to reach and engage their members and giving them the opportunity to help spread outreach efforts brings ownership and investment in the collaborative effort.



El Yunque National Forest Plan Revision Workshop

Illustrations and Recommendations

- To initiate the plan revision public engagement process, the El Yunque National Forest held a 2-day workshop with representatives from communities, agencies, organizations and forest employees to learn about plan revision, collaboration, and discuss how they would like to be involved. As a result of the workshop, the **Citizens' Collaboration Committee** was formed to help the El Yunque National Forest design effective outreach methods and engagement strategies.
- It's important to be transparent and clearly communicate a desire to hear from all interested parties. Although it's beneficial to seek strategic advice from community and organization leaders, it's important to be inclusive. One forest established a process advisory group comprised of key local stakeholders. While this advisory group was not intended to exclude participation by anyone, some members of the public felt that "only a select few" were being allowed to participate. The forest had to manage negative publicity as well as bad feelings in the community.

Other examples of outreach techniques and ideas include:

- Seek partners or co-sponsors for public events. Although hired facilitators are a useful agency tool for bringing third-party objectivity to public meetings, working with stakeholders and partners such as universities, county agencies, or local community groups to co-sponsor public events brings additional visibility and credibility to forest engagement efforts.
- Sponsor training/skill-building activities for stakeholders and partners. Bringing groups or individuals with successful collaboration experience to work with the forest and stakeholders will build collaborative capacity in the community benefiting current and future forest and community projects.
- Although providing timely information via the web is an important tool, personal engagement whenever possible is the strongest approach. Most forests have a wealth of staff/public relationships that can be used to contact diverse forest audiences. For example, consider having line officers personally invite elected officials, grazing staff make contact with permittees, recreation site hosts contact campers, etc.

Lesson 2 - Set clear expectations up front.

All participants, both internal and external, have expectations regarding their roles, decision making, time frames, communication styles, outcomes, etc. Unmet expectations can erode trust in the process and in the agency itself. Your participants want to be kept informed, understand how their contributions are being used, and feel their time is well spent. However, it's important that those expectations are realistic and don't exceed the agency's or community's ability to perform or deliver. Setting and meeting expectations requires commitment of resources, time, and people.

The initial engagement efforts are an important time to establish clear expectations and develop trust. Effective two-way communication of both the public's and the agency's expectations is important. Responding to participant ideas for the best methods to communicate with them and others and providing a feedback loop about how their input was used (or not and why) will help you build a strong foundation for a successful public participation effort.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- Several forests organizing for plan revision have discussed expectations at public events. For example, at the Santa Fe National Forest [Organizing for Public Participation](#) workshops, stakeholders, other agency and government staff, and Santa Fe National Forest employees completed a worksheet on public engagement expectations. Small groups were formed to discuss their expectations. The worksheet explored aspects such as the stakeholder's expectations of forest and the forest's expectations of stakeholders.
- Another forest provides an example of unmet expectations. As the forest embarked on plan revision and scheduled a series of meetings to invite the public to engage in the multi-year planning process, the forest found many stakeholders skeptical of making a commitment because of a recent experience with travel management. In that situation, stakeholders had committed to attend monthly evening meetings to participate in group discussions and expected their input would help shape a decision on road and trail closures.

The decision was very different from the group discussions and many stakeholders felt they did not receive feedback on why their input was not considered or incorporated in the final decision. As a result of this earlier experience, many stakeholders seemed reticent to commit to another multi-year process.

Lesson 3 - Implement a multi-faceted public participation strategy to encourage a robust collaborative engagement. Employ engagement methods that relate to varied audiences.

The 2012 Planning Rule requires the agency to engage Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other federal agencies, state and local governments, individuals, and organizations – including youth, low-income and minority populations. Reaching these varied stakeholders will require you to vary your approaches appropriate to the audience. No one method or two will be sufficient for all.

Public participation employs a spectrum of approaches, techniques, and tools from inform, consult, and involve, to collaborate⁴. These vary in their intensity and required time and effort, as well as their potential pay-offs from investment. The phases and elements of the plan revision effort need to be assessed and prioritized regarding which approach is most appropriate for which task or phase, and may vary by audience. As mentioned in the previous lesson, it's essential to ask your stakeholders how they would like to be involved throughout the process as you develop your public engagement strategy.

⁴ 1909.12 Chapter 41 Exhibit 01

Illustrations and Recommendations

- The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest partnered with a University of Idaho graduate student to lead a youth engagement effort during the spring school year and summer camp season of 2014. Caitlin McGraw's professional paper, [*Developing and Implementing a Youth Engagement Strategy for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest Management Plan Revision*](#), describes her successful effort.
- To help set the tone for a workshop launching plan revision, El Yunque National Forest had four individuals representing three different generations and perspectives, give brief presentations addressing the question "What the El Yunque National Forest means to me?" at the start of each day. The two student presenters were the winners of a local school essay contest that was sponsored by the EL Yunque National Forest. Engaging the local schools was valuable on a number of levels, not the least of which is that it responded directly to a requirement of the planning rule to outreach to youth.
- One important lesson learned from many of the current plan revision efforts is the importance of including national audiences during forest efforts to engage local stakeholders. Information shared at local meetings must also be available electronically for all interested parties. An explanation of the forest's role to consider input from both local and national audiences needs to be clearly articulated so individuals and organizations at both the local and national level don't lose trust in the agency's public engagement processes.
- Many forests have used *Talking Points*, the collaborative mapping tool to engage national and local stakeholders and solicit feedback for several different phases of revision including wilderness inventory and evaluation, timber suitability, and other aspects of the assessment. It's an interactive web-based public participation tool that promotes information sharing and collaboration and improves access to land data.
- Most forests are using social media (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) to reach out to both local and national audiences and to inform them of upcoming plan revision events. The Tonto National Forest uses [Flickr](#) to post pictures of their plan revision events, [YouTube](#) to link to their plan revision videos, and a dedicated plan revision [website](#). However, remember it takes staff and time to manage online tools, plan accordingly.
- The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest partnered with the University of Montana graduate students to publish the document, [*Public Participation: Lessons Learned Implementing the 2012 US Forest Service Planning Rule*](#). It describes the "early-adopter" revision forests' lessons learned with tribal consultation and local government coordination.

Lesson 4 - Learn and practice participatory engagement rather than "command and control" communication.

Stakeholders prefer "talking with" Forest Service personnel rather than being "talked at." In other words, they prefer opportunities for participatory and interactive dialogue, rather than just passive public presentations of information. Creating opportunities for conversations and engagement for all participants including forest personnel will help you achieve better successes with collaborative efforts.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- An article in the local newspaper captures the spirit of the initial meetings for the Carson National Forest plan revision effort. *In an initial series of public meetings, Kevin Naranjo [forest planner] said the agency made a very conscious effort to sit back and let the public offer opinions on what was important and what changes need to be made. He said the response was impressive. “What we found at our public meetings is listening is powerful,” Naranjo says. “We started by hearing from the public how they value the forest. They got to talk and we listened.”* (The Taos News, July 26, 2015)
- The Lincoln National Forest held a series of “community conversations” with seating around small tables and forest staff hosted dialogue around specific topics. Forest personnel found it not only achieved the meeting goals around plan revision engagement, but also showed promise to improve communication and relationships for ongoing program of work. The grazing staff and permittees decided to begin scheduling monthly meetings using the same format as a method to improve communication and dialogue.

Lesson 5 - Defog the planning process: technical presentations—particularly about the planning process—should be easy to understand.

The planning process is complex and can be difficult to describe. As you develop communications such as letters, hand-outs, FAQs, presentations, and web content, you should use language that is clear and understandable. Acronyms should be used selectively and explained when commonly used. As agency staff have often heard, “plain speak” is preferable to “plan speak.”

Illustrations and Recommendations

- Using metaphors and analogies that are meaningful and relevant to the audience can be a stepping stone to understanding complex planning concepts. Some forest plan revision presentations have compared forest plans to community, county, or regional comprehensive plans, to a business plan, or even to a plan to build a house. Talk to people so they can understand and be involved.
- When preparing initial plan revision presentations, consider focusing on three points: 1) What is plan revision and why does it matter; 2) What are the three phases of the planning rule and where are we now – assessment, revision, and monitoring and what steps are involved with each; 3) What are effective ways to communicate with participants and how would they like to be engaged throughout each phase. We have learned that as the phases are being discussed, it is good to provide examples of why participants might want to be engaged at that particular step.
- Forests have developed various resources to help clarify the plan revision process and make it understandable, including PowerPoint presentations. The [Gila National Forest’s](#) initial public outreach presentation is a good example of being clear and to the point. (However as mentioned earlier, presentations are a passive engagement tool and they need to be balanced with participatory dialogue.) Other clear information examples include the [video](#) and the [People’s Glossary of Ecosystem Management Terms](#) produced by the Tonto National Forest and the [Glossary of Forest Plan Revision Terms](#) created by the Cibola National Forest to help explain complex terms and acronyms. There are also [agency-wide plan revision videos](#) available. ([short version](#))

Lesson 6 - Be responsive to cultural factors such as identity, history, and symbols.

Cultural identities and meanings are tremendously important to everyone, but doubly so in the rural/traditional areas that tend to surround forests. Some of your newly hired revision ID team staff may know little about a community's cultural history and traditions. Being sensitive to local traditions, values, and patterns of interaction goes a long way to closing the agency/community divide. Consider having groups give presentations or short topic discussions around their specific cultural identity at collaborative meetings to foster greater understanding around the different values of forest users.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- Many forests, as part of their public engagement, held meetings regularly in community centers, senior centers, libraries, and schools. Using these sites showed respect for the local communities and their culture. As previously suggested, consider asking local leaders to engage their associated community groups to expand outreach efforts beyond typical forest audiences.



Tonto National Forest Plan Revision Workshop held at a Local School.

- Some forests like the El Yunque National Forest and Santa Fe National Forest provide bilingual plan revision information. The El Yunque National Forest's plan revision [website](#) and all plan revision documents are available in Spanish. Region 5 developed a *Latino Awareness and Engagement Guidebook*.
- At one Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest collaborative plan revision meeting, a member of the Nez Perce Tribe gave a presentation on the tribe's cultural and ancestral ties to the forest and the legal treaty rights associated with the forest lands.
- The Carson National Forest produced a [video](#) – A Shared Vision through Forest Plan Revision - describing the history of the forests in Northern New Mexico and the complexities involved in accomplishing forest plan revision.

2 Theme Two: Utilize Personnel and Staffing Resources Productively

Lesson 7 - Engagement and communication with communities and stakeholders should be ongoing and consistent.

The people with whom you have developed trust through collaborative work have a legitimate expectation of continual communication throughout the revision process. Failing to “close the loop” with participants may undermine hard won trust. It is particularly important to inform the participants when key process milestones (such as finalization of issues, or a decision) are reached.

Considering the multiple public engagement requirements for plan revision, we strongly recommend you identify a communication and/or public engagement team and/or someone who serves as a communication and/or collaboration specialist or coordinator. Communication should be ongoing, even if only to provide updates of continued analysis efforts with little or no obvious change from the previous engagement. When communication “gaps” occur (such as long periods of silence) stakeholder will fill in those gaps by constructing their own meanings, which may be based on misperceptions, misunderstandings, or previous unsatisfactory experiences of Forest Service planning efforts.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- When staffing for revision, consider hiring a half to full time public affairs/web master/collaboration coordinator position. Keeping up with web publications, public notifications, elected official briefings, meeting requests, and phone calls, as well as scheduling, planning, and executing public meetings takes a considerable amount of time. Depending on a sole ID team leader to successfully lead the effort to complete an assessment, forest plan, and environment impact statement (EIS) in less than 4 years in tandem with continued responsive public engagement is unreasonable.
- During the Lincoln National Forest initial outreach conversations with the public, there was not enough time to answer the many questions participants submitted. To close the loop, the Lincoln National Forest staff asked participants to write their questions on index cards and promised to respond to all the questions in a [document](#) they would post on their website.
- The Chugach National Forest uses a [forest plan revision newsletter](#) to help keep stakeholders informed of the plan revision process between public meetings.

Lesson 8 - Robust collaborative engagement takes time and effort.

It is important to set realistic time and staffing expectations for effective collaborative public engagement. In addition to ID team leaders and public information officers, line officer and ID team member participation is important for building trust and providing accurate resource information. Resource staffs need time to prepare materials and information, public participants need time to review the information for informed dialogue, and staff need time to follow up on information requests and questions.

Working to understand and meet public expectations is essential to build and maintain trust in the agency. Follow through is crucial. Forest leaders need to plan for how to respond and use citizen contributions and how to inform them of the next steps.

You should also anticipate time will be needed for a “looping back” in providing information and explanation as new stakeholders engage or local leadership changes (e.g., tribal or county elections).

Illustrations and Recommendations

- The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, a 2012 Planning Rule “early-adopter” forest, spent 11 Saturdays over as many months holding daylong working group meetings to prepare the plan revision proposed action. The forest supervisor, staff, the ID team, and a dedicated “collaboration coordinator” position committed to a continual feedback loop with the collaborative group to keep participants engaged and interested in the lengthy revision effort. The collaboration coordinator used personal invitations, timely responses to emails and phone calls, and continual web updates to build and maintain relationships for ongoing meaningful involvement. See the [Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest website](#) for more information about their planning effort.
- The Santa Fe National Forest reached out to the public early to build understanding of the plan revision process and collaborative capacity. Together with the Carson National Forest, they invited the Collaboration Cadre to conduct listening sessions with community stakeholders to assess the local situation and learn about the capacity for collaboration. The information generated through the listening sessions informed two daylong workshops held with community members and Forest Service personnel to organize for public participation. Robust public engagement early on heightened participants’ awareness of the time, resources and staff needed to create and maintain effective collaborative engagement. See the [Santa Fe National Forest Plan Revision website](#) for more information about these early efforts.

Lesson 9 - All forest personnel need a basic understanding of forest plan revision.

Forest Plan revision will be a large, lengthy, and likely controversial process that will receive substantial media coverage and public attention. All forest personnel need to be aware of the effort and its basic purpose and content. Your employees with more active roles in the revision process will obviously have more specific knowledge and training, but all employees should be informed enough about plan revision and planning rule requirements in order to answer their neighbor’s questions or refer them to forest personnel with appropriate expertise. Everyone should be an ambassador for the revision effort as their minimum contribution to the overall plan revision collaborative effort.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- A forest employee runs into an acquaintance at the local grocery store who asks him “what is this planning process I read about in the newspaper? Are you all trying to close off our access to the forest again?” The employee responds, “We’re working to revise the forest plan that will guide our management and activities for the next 15 years. Your input is important. Can I send you some information on how you can participate?” is a much better answer than “I don’t know anything about it, but you’re probably right.” Ensure comprehensive and consistent communication internally, as well as externally. If there is a void, misinformation may fill the gap and it will then take longer to convey the accurate information.
- Forests have used different approaches to educate and inform personnel about plan revision: hosting brown bag lunches at all district offices, creating a SharePoint site to post information, and presenting their external public engagement efforts internally at each district office. Keeping forest employees engaged, informed and educated will also be key to a successful plan and transition from the revision planning effort to implementation of the new plan.

Lesson 10 - Training/skill-building is essential.

Most employees work collaboratively in different ways, whether they are aware of it or not. Some work collaboratively only with colleagues and others work with partners, permittees, or stakeholders. Regardless of their position in the agency, all employees benefit from learning about effective collaborative efforts and approaches through sharing knowledge and experiences on forest or specific training opportunities. Forests with a shared understanding of effective public engagement can capitalize on the day-to-day working relationships between forest employees and stakeholders to improve plan revision outreach and collaborative efforts.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- Some forests use an experienced steering committee to gain efficiency organizing their public participation. The committee should be familiar with planning requirements and bring skills needed to manage large project efforts to help develop effective internal and external engagement strategies.
- Many forests have hosted collaboration training such as the **Collaboration Cadre's Understanding Collaboration** and the **Leader as Convener training** for the unit personnel and stakeholders to provide a shared understanding of the concepts and language. One forest also held communication training for plan revision staff.



National Forests and Grasslands in Texas -
Collaboration Training

Lesson 11 - Clarify the early and ongoing roles of line officers to both internal and external participants.

All forest line officers (forest supervisor, deputy if applicable, *and* district rangers) and key staff need to understand the importance of their respective roles in the plan revision public engagement. Clearly communicating where, when and how forest leadership is involved will demonstrate the forest is conducting an integrated cohesive process. You need to inform your stakeholders when they will have opportunity to interact with the decision-makers, specialists, neutral facilitators, or combinations thereof, etc.

Rangers are the information conduit to their staffs from forest leadership, and they are the face of the agency to local communities. Rangers should help educate their staffs on the planning process, including collaboration. This also presents a great opportunity for them to influence the plan content, gain ownership in the final product, and improve their capacity for project-level planning and public participation in the future. Program manager participation brings specialized resource knowledge to help educate public participants of the many competing values the forest must consider.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- On the Gila National Forest, line officers and planning staff participated in a facilitated daylong work session to clarify the purpose, format, and roles and responsibilities for the first public events. By taking the time to bring everyone together, they were able to clarify not only their initial but ongoing roles and responsibilities and expectations. As a result of this work session, the district rangers were able to articulate a consistent message about their roles and responsibilities both internally and during the public events that occurred in several communities. They also became more invested in the plan revision process.

- The district rangers from the Lincoln National Forest who participated with their staff in community meetings about plan revision provided improved credibility and sense of importance to the process. They were able to provide a great deal of factual information about land, resources and issues, and improve stakeholder relationships.
- During the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest collaborative meetings, participants appreciated the broad leadership representation in their small group discussions. Many gained a new appreciation for the challenges the agency faces in balancing the multiple uses of our forests.

Lesson 12 - Changes in leadership positions should include significant transition time and activities.

Although the Forest Service recognizes the operational challenges associated with line officer transition, it can significantly impact plan revision efforts. A change in leadership after lengthy public engagement can leave stakeholders uncertain of their established expectations and distrustful of continuing their contributions to collaboration. Outgoing and incoming line officers would benefit from spending meaningful time together, with the outgoing person helping the new line officer become familiar with the forest communities, stakeholders, and the commitments the outgoing line officer has made. Committing time and resources to leadership transition would improve consistency and agency credibility. Transition issues apply to changes in staff officer and ID team leadership as well.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- After a new forest supervisor, a second new revision team leader, and several new rangers joined the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest with revision in mid-stream, the new forest supervisor set up an advisory group with a subset of key line and staff from the forest leadership team. The goal is to provide better leadership engagement in the revision effort and ensure continuity over time. Members of the advisory group rotate attendance at all revision ID team meetings to help with the tough questions and convey consistent leader intent.
- The Nantahala-Pisgah provides a similar example. Their revision steering committee's role is to provide direction around high-profile issues like recommended wilderness and help coordinate additional assistance and document review from employees around the forest when needed. The goal is to always provide the revision team with what they need to keep progressing. The invaluable benefit is ongoing leadership engagement and improved communication with forest employees.

3 Theme Three: Devote Time and Attention to Logistics and Design

Lesson 13 - Early and thoughtful public engagement planning pays off.

A considerable amount of organizing for public engagement should occur prior to initiating the assessment phase. It's important you identify existing and desired relationships early so there are opportunities for all stakeholders to frame the public engagement strategy. This is an important step to encourage their initial and continued participation in the revision effort. It not only builds the foundation for effective engagement throughout the revision effort, but ideally builds relationships for continued support through implementation efforts over the life of the plan. Forests are finding that embracing the importance of this step and working collaboratively with stakeholders in addition to the NEPA public involvement procedural requirements are building better plans.

Periodically assessing, or monitoring, ongoing public engagement efforts is an additional important step to ensure both public and agency expectations are inline.

Illustrations and Recommendations

- The Gila National Forest began to focus on relationships and procedural factors by hosting **community conversations** as one way to begin organizing for plan revision public engagement. Although they had their initial public engagement strategy framed prior to their outreach efforts, the values and expectation information they learned through their community conversations enriched and improved their strategy.
- The Santa Fe and Carson National Forests asked the Collaboration Cadre to have informal conversations with key stakeholders to assess the forests' relationship and procedural capacity for collaboration. See the **Santa Fe National Forest** website to learn more about the informal conversations.
- The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest partnered with University of Idaho early in the plan revision effort with a "kick-off summit" to educate prospective participants on the time commitments and the value of dedicated participation for successful collaboration. In addition, the University facilitated the forest and public's design for the plan revision public engagement format. This initial effort laid a solid groundwork for building trust in the process and fostering long-term meaningful engagement. Both the forest and participants have benefited from this. In one example, after gaining a better understanding of various forest users' cherished values, the ID team built plan components they had not considered previously to specifically address that information.

Forest Plan Revision Community Conversations with the Gila National Forest

The Gila National Forest is getting ready to revise a management plan that has been in place for almost 30 years. This planning effort will be an excellent opportunity to strengthen links between the forest and nearby residents, users, and interested people of all types.

The very first events—which are occurring even before the process is starting—are a series of conversations being held in communities around the Forest the week of March 9th, 2015. Attending one of these meetings would allow you to learn why this planning process matters, but also allow us to get your ideas about how to organize our outreach and involvement efforts. The details of the locations, dates and times are shown below. Feel free to share this flier with friends and neighbors, and forward it to organizations you belong to.

The desired outcomes of these conversations are to:

- Build and enhance relationships between the Gila National Forest and its stakeholders
- Identify expectations for public participation
- Encourage shared learning
- Explore opportunities and preferred methods for engagement during Forest Plan Revision, and the best ways to share ideas and information and keep people informed concerning Forest Plan Revision.

Community Conversation Schedule:

| Monday March 9 th | Tuesday March 10 th | Wednesday March 11 th | Thursday March 12 th |
|---|---|--|--|
| QUEMADO Quemado Ranger District Time: 5 pm – 8 pm Location: Quemado Consolidated School | RESERVE Reserve Ranger District Time: 10 am – 1 pm Location: Carron County Fair Grounds, in Fair Building | SILVER CITY Silver City Ranger District /Gila National Forest Time: 5 pm – 8 pm Location: Grant County Conference Center | LAKE ROBERTS Wilderness Ranger District Time: 9 am – 12 pm Location: Little Toad creek Inn near Lake Roberts |
| | GLENNWOOD Glennwood Ranger District Time: 5 pm – 8 pm Location: Glennwood Community Center | | TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES Black Range Ranger District Time: 5 pm – 8 pm Location: Sierra County Fairgrounds |

• Future public participation meetings and collaborative workshops, as well as information updates, will be posted on our website <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/gila/home?cid=STELPRD3282671>.

• Email gilaplan@fs.fed.us with any comments, questions or additional ideas.

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Lesson 14 - *Adopt a “participant-centered” mindset when planning and scheduling events.*

Recognize that attending a public meeting of any kind—particularly a forest plan revision meeting—is a voluntary act for many of the people you hope to attract. People lead busy lives and have many competing demands for their time. If you want them to choose your meeting over the other things they might be doing, you have to design it with them in mind. Choices about where to hold it, when to hold it, how much lead time between invitations and the event, how often meetings need to be, etc., all need to be made with a participant-centered mindset. Meetings arranged to Forest Service employee convenience often results in folks in green outnumbering the public participants. Provide the public with an incentive to want to engage from a positive perspective.

Illustration

- Even though the funding may be difficult to arrange, finding some way to feed people at meetings is useful at several different levels. Even a simple beverage and cookie service creates a community feel rarely found at public meetings. Both the El Yunque and Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests used all-day workshops during revision engagement and they found that providing lunch largely eliminated the loss of participants mid-day and provided additional opportunities for relaxed stakeholder dialogue.

Lesson 15 - *Utilize both forest staff and the public's ideas for the development, design, and implementation of public participation events and activities.*

The public’s knowledge about the when, where, and how to hold public events is invaluable for reaching and maintaining broad participation. Asking how they would like to participate and being responsive to those ideas and requests is essential to building trust and constructive partnerships.

In addition, working with a wide range of forest staff to develop your public engagement strategy brings valuable knowledge of district-to-stakeholder relationships, as well as employee personal community connections. Having forest staff articulate their desired outcomes for public engagement efforts fosters employee ownership of the forest’s vision as well.

Illustration

- The Lincoln National Forest staff brainstormed many outreach ideas and one district grazing program manager agreed to personally invite his permittee contacts. As described in another illustration, the program manager found the resulting attendance and dialogue at the initial plan revision “community conversations” productive both in terms of meeting’s topic (designing the plan revision public engagement process) and in improving their working relationship for ongoing grazing program. This example also illustrated the benefits of forest staff having a vested interest in the public meeting outcome as a result of having been actively engaged in the design of the community conversations.

Lesson 16 - *Document, document, document.*

Your public outreach efforts are an essential part of your planning record. It’s never too early to start your project record file. Considering the amount of time revision takes, the tasks to be accomplished, and the likelihood of changing staff (local government and Forest Service), the project record file is the institutional memory that will support your ongoing public engagement and the final decision. The record provides documentation to stakeholders and new Forest Service employees of the public participation and collaboration that has occurred to date.

Final Thoughts

The “lessons” presented in this report are drawn from the experiences of Collaboration Cadre teams and their work with forest staffs and stakeholders throughout the country. As stated in the introduction, the lessons don’t represent a single correct approach or methodology, but offer insights on the best practices based on the public engagement experiences of ongoing plan revision efforts. This document offers examples and ideas for improving collaboration, participation, and communication – key dimensions of the public engagement philosophy emphasized in the 2012 Planning Rule. But in the end, it is about your openness and willing to work and commit to authentic engagement.

About the National Collaboration Cadre

The **Collaboration Cadre** provides coaching and training assistance to National Forests, their communities, and interested stakeholders to help them engage in meaningful public participation and effective collaboration. The Collaboration Cadre is a network of people from around the US who represent different perspectives of a collaborative process: academic, agency, and community. The Collaboration Cadre offers a unique approach that models and blends the perspectives of the Forest Service, communities, and academic research through the guidance of experienced collaboration advocates.

The Collaboration Cadre has worked with eleven forests revising their land management plans (forest plans) under the 2012 Planning Rule. The forests requested varying levels of support from the Collaboration Cadre ranging from coaching, training, and facilitating their initial public engagement to just training. The Collaboration Cadre worked with the El Yunque, Tonto, Carson, Santa Fe, Cibola, Lincoln, Gila, Chugach, Custer Gallatin and Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forests and National Forests and Grasslands in Texas.

The Collaboration Cadre helps National Forests and their communities organize and prepare for public engagement for plan revision. Specific tasks the Collaboration Cadre can offer your forest includes:

- Coaching & preparing for public engagement
- Providing “Understanding Collaboration” training
- Building forest leadership support for plan revision
- Building the awareness & importance among the forest personnel at large in the revision efforts
- Planning & facilitating initial community outreach/community conversations

Acknowledgment

The Collaboration Cadre would like to thank all the forests that invited us to work with them and experience firsthand their challenges and opportunities with public engagement under the 2012 Planning Rule. We appreciate their continued commitment to authentic public engagement. We also thank community members and stakeholders who contribute their time, knowledge, and energy to National Forest planning.

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