

Handout

Module 4: Social Accountability Tool

Public Hearing



Lesson 4.6: Public Hearing

1- What is a public hearing?

Public hearings are formal meetings at the community level where local officials and citizens have the opportunity to exchange information and opinions on community affairs. A typical example would be public hearings of community budgets.

2- Purpose

These meetings are open to the general public and are therefore an important tool for citizens to raise their concerns in front of elected officials and bureaucrats on the one hand and an important feedback mechanism for the officials to gain a better understanding of the citizens' experiences and views on the other hand. Public hearings are often one element in a social audit initiative.

How is it implemented?

3- Step of Implantation

The following is a suggested list of things that needs to be considered while using public hearings as a social accountability tool.

1. Resources: Sufficient financial and labor resources need to be set aside for conducting the promotional campaign, the hearing and any follow-up activities.
2. Task force: Public hearings involve a great deal of planning and work. A task force (including representatives from all stakeholders) should be responsible for the implementation.
3. Timely and widespread publicity for the public hearing: The event has to be well-advertised in the community to allow people to discuss the issues under consideration with friends and family beforehand. This ensures the inclusion of views even of people unable to attend the meeting. A variety of public promotional techniques (advertisement, billboards, brochures, direct mail, feature stories, news conferences/releases, newsletters, posters, special events, word of mouth, radio broadcast etc.) should be used to attract different audiences. Essential information should be distributed well beforehand and again during the meeting.
4. Setting ground rules for participation: Ground rules should be designed and explained to the participants in order to keep the discussion productive. When setting these rules one should consider the different roles of those involved, the time frame for discussing each issue, the time each individual will be allowed to speak and how often, how the input will be used both during the meeting and for the follow-up.
5. Choice of facilitator: A professional and impartial facilitator capable of handling conflict and enforcing ground rules is crucial for the success of the hearing. A good facilitator will increase the likelihood that citizens and officials will overcome their mutual suspicions and openly discuss the issues at hand.
6. Selection of issues, time and location: The issues of the hearing should be of great relevance to the community and conveyed in a way to attract a large turnout. Time and location are equally important to ensure broad attendance. If available,

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audiovisual equipment should be used to ensure that participants can see and hear properly.

7. Follow-up: The organizers should summarize the hearing in an (impartial) report submitted to the public and the sponsors as soon as possible after the hearing. If individuals or officials agree in the public hearing to take action, they should report on their actions and the task force should monitor the government's action on such commitments.