Engaging the Public

Engagement from the Public’s Perspective
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How do we get from this?
To this?
My Background

- Started early in environmental activism
- Retired from the City of Austin, Texas after 28 years in environmental field
  - Represented Austin in the Longhorn pipeline lawsuit and negotiations with other operators
- Worked with neighborhoods, property owners, activists, legislators, pipeline companies, developers, regulatory agencies, etc.
- Managed high risk/controversial projects in dense neighborhoods and sensitive environmental areas
- Led PIPA subcommittee on best practices for cooperation between pipeline operators, land owners, developers, and local governments
- Public rep on recent PST Public Engagement Solutions Working Group
- Public rep on PHMSA Hazardous Liquids Pipeline Technical Advisory Committee
What is Engagement?

From the public’s perspective engagement is:

- An open, honest, good faith dialogue between the parties
  - A sharing of technical information
  - Timely, not after the decision is made
  - Not “window dressing” or subverted by other efforts to sabotage or diminish
  - Open to all interested parties
  - Respectful of all parties interests
  - A level playing field
  - LISTENING and asking questions

These develop TRUST and real communication occurs
Open, Honest, Good Faith Dialogue

- Share and respect each party's interests and goals
  - Understand that each may have different perspectives and interests
  - Different doesn’t mean wrong
- No “hiding the ball”, share it all; good, bad, or ugly
- Be thick skinned, try not to make things personal
- Shouting and personal attacks shuts everyone down
- Let everyone hear the questions and the answers
  - There is a place for 1:1 conversations
- It’s okay to agree to disagree, but say so
“Technical” Information

- **Give us the data and studies!** Not watered down, sanitized summaries
- Talk honestly about risk, both probability and consequence
- Don’t wait to be asked, i.e., come prepared with information likely to be requested
- Respect non-technical people’s ability to understand technical information
- If you can’t share it, say so and explain why (legal, competitive, proprietary, etc.)
- Be understanding of company limitations of information sharing (see above)
- If you don’t know, say so and get the information later, if you can’t, explain why
Window Dressing and Subversion

- Going through the motions = Recipe for disaster
- Bring the right people to the party
- Don’t structure meetings to divide and isolate
  - Open houses work best paired with open, general meeting with Q&A
- Acknowledge any parallel efforts that may be counter to any parties goals, e.g. legal action, legislative lobbying, condemnation, etc.
- Industry efforts to subvert public rights damages engagement on specific projects
Leveling the Playing Field

Today's rules and processes give most of the power to the industry

- Agency access
- Eminent domain
- Financial/technical resources and information access
- Political climate

- Go to the community early and often (land planners, property owners, environmental groups, elected officials)
- Provide an easily accessible technical person as point of contact and be responsive
- If possible, provide a local POC (particularly for operating pipelines)
- Understand limitations to participation (money, time) and find ways to remove those barriers

When people feel powerless they lash out
Engagement Can Save Time and Money

Investment on the front end in high quality engagement can result in:

- Reduced litigation
- Better community relations
- Better agency relations
- Safer communities and environment
- Safer pipelines
Thank You!

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