

## **ARIZONA CIVIC TRAINING – ACT!**

**Samoan Circle**      *A leaderless form of meeting that stimulates active participation.*

### **Use to**

- ❑ *Give voice to diverse opinions on exceptionally controversial subjects—where no one is perceived to be neutral enough to moderate a meeting*

### **Timing**

- ❑ *Because lack of trust is often a central issue, make an extra effort to include a diverse group of potential participants, ensuring a wide representation of views*
- ❑ *Carefully consider time and location to ensure the event is accessible to all potential participants*
- ❑ *It may be useful to poll potential participants in advance to identify time and/or location barriers*
- ❑ *The location must be available for as long as needed; a Samoan Circle is over when everyone who wants to speak has had an opportunity to do so*

### **Preparation**

- ❑ *Review public participation plan objectives to determine if a Samoan Circle would contribute to achieving them*
- ❑ *Review Samoan Circle process with project team members and decision makers; get agreement from all to follow the process*
- ❑ *Have non-involved people review all descriptions of the process and event notices, including advertisements, announcements, invitations, handouts, prepared opening statement*
- ❑ *Advertise the event with a clear explanation of the process and your objective*
- ❑ *Prepare a handout for all participants that provides a simple explanation of the Samoan Circle process. Include a diagram of the seating circles and speaker microphones*
- ❑ *Plan for equipment and refreshments*
- ❑ *Ensure project team members take random seats throughout the circles; review nonverbal language cues and appropriate body language with team members*

### **Implementation**

- ❑ *Ensure room set-up is complete at least 45 minutes before scheduled start time; test microphones*
- ❑ *Remind project team of meeting objectives and their roles; they do not control the meeting so should relax and be attentive*
- ❑ *Assign someone to greet participants as they arrive and provide Samoan Circle handout; point the way to the refreshment table; ensure greeter remains available to greet and orient latecomers*
- ❑ *At the meeting start time, ask participants to take seats in the concentric circles of chairs*
- ❑ *The meeting convener briefly explains the Samoan Circle process and rules*
  - *One speaker at a time. Speakers must be seated in center circle/at table and in possession of a microphone.*
  - *Speaker chairs may be occupied only temporarily by anyone wanting to present a point of view. When finished, speakers return to the outer circle.*
  - *Those wanting to speak, signal this by standing silently behind one of the people in the speaker's circle*
  - *Speakers may return to the speaker's circle to make additional comments*

### **Documentation**

- ❑ *Encourage participants to complete comment cards. Solicit input about the effectiveness of the process as well as input on the project*
- ❑ *Recorders summarize key points made by each speaker*
- ❑ *A written summary of the event can be included in the public participation plan, provided to stakeholders in regular scheduled communications (newsletters, project updates) and posted on the project's Web site*
- ❑ *Copies of the summary can be provided to event participants and to the public*

### **Hints**

- ❑ *A Samoan Circle can be used effectively with as few as 10 or as many as 500 people*
- ❑ *Dialogue can be stalled or become monopolized...if attendees permit; convener must be clear that participants, as a group, control the meeting*
- ❑ *Convener may want to ask for questions relating to understanding the process just after explaining it*
- ❑ *Project team members and/or decision maker may take a seat in the speakers circle, as appropriate, but must respect the process and other participants; they may not monopolize the circle*

### **Debrief**

- ❑ *After the event, gather the team together to debrief; Ask:*
  - *What went well?*
  - *What could be improved?*
  - *Was anything confusing?*
  - *What are the major things we learned?*
  - *What action is needed for requests and/or questions asked by attendees?*
  - *How well did the event meet the objectives outlined in the public participation plan?*

### **Resources**

- ❑ *Staffing*
  - *Fewer project staff generally required than at an open house*
  - *Several people are needed to record the key points of the discussion*
- ❑ *Equipment*
  - *Microphone for each speaker's chair*
  - *Speaker's table (optional)*
  - *Free-standing chairs*
  - *Recorders' stations*
  - *Flip charts or computers for recorders*
- ❑ *Space and room set-up*
  - *Include a sign-in table at the entrance*
  - *Locate refreshment station on the opposite side of the room*
  - *Set up room in concentric circles of chairs with four to six speaker's chairs in the center, microphones for each and an optional table in the center*
- ❑ *Budget*
  - *The largest expense is staff time*

**Variations**

- *In its pure form, the circle continues until everyone who wishes to, has spoken*
- *The convener may gradually close the meeting by coming to the speaker's circle and, when it's his or her turn to take a seat, instead removes that seat. This can be repeated until all speaker seats are gone.*

*The Samoan Circle was created by IAP2 founding member Larry Aggens, [www.involve.com](http://www.involve.com).*