

Identifying 'the public':
Who should be involved in developing information technology to support public participation?
And, Internet-Based Public Policy Participation for Rural Community Citizens

Birds of a Feather Session, dg.o2004
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Two BOF proposed discussions focusing on public involvement for digital activities were combined into a single discussion group. One originally focused on special considerations for rural populations and the other on strategies for identifying appropriate publics for outreach and research. About 8 participants from a variety of projects joined the discussion.

Special strategies for rural environments mentioned during the discussion included: actively engaging citizens on line as well as off line, e.g. keeping rural citizens informed through online information posting as well as printed newsletters. Fundamental challenges for digital activities in rural environments were identified:

- 1) The degree of preference for Internet vs. phone;
- 2) How to enhance the Internet acceptance rate given (1);
- 3) The appropriate number of organizations involved;
- 4) Guidelines and recommendations on the management of participating organizations.

General strategies for identifying and reaching appropriate publics/subjects were also discussed. Specific strategies included:

- 1) Targeted stratified sampling techniques, e.g., randomly digit phone surveys with screening questions can be used to generate a representative sample for surveys;
- 2) Triangulation of methods, i.e., using combinations of qualitative and quantitative strategies can help ensure that the results are valid;
- 3) Ways to identify potential interest groups include using indices of prominence and power, such as the number of times a group is cited in newspapers; the number of times a group testifies or provides comments to government; lists of endorsements for related legislation or initiatives.

Challenges in this area include the time required to establish and maintain relationships with partners and researching populations not typically served by the Internet.

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