

Variability of Community Attitudes and Behaviors Relevant to Environmental Issues

Not all communities hold the same attitudes or respond to threats or perceived threats in the same way. This table provides examples of general, community-wide attitudes and behaviors that persons charged with designing community outreach/public involvement programs may encounter. Readers should consider how identifying such attitudes and behaviors would help them tailor effective outreach programs. (Note: these are only a few examples of possible attitudes or behaviors that readers may encounter; there can be many others).

Attitudes/Behaviors	Characteristics of Community A (Hypothetical)	Characteristics of Community B (Hypothetical)
Attitudes toward industry	Positive attitude toward industry, and the belief that industry adds to the community. There is a definite connection in residents' minds between the benefits provided by jobs and property taxes and the presence of industry in their community.	Neutral or negative attitudes toward industry. These attitudes may be due to past labor strife, downsizing, perceptions of "stigma" from the presence of "dirty" industry, etc. Such attitudes are frequently found among new residents who commute elsewhere to work and perceive no overriding value from the facilities located in their "bedroom community."
Attitudes toward industry's compliance with environmental regulations and the effectiveness of those regulations	General belief that industry complies with environmental regulations and that these regulations are protective of human health and the environment.	Belief that industry doesn't comply with environment regulations unless forced to do so, or that regulations are not protective of human health and the environment.
Attitudes toward "outsiders"	Residents prefer to address local environmental issues themselves. They are unlikely to invite into their communities "outsiders," such as representatives from environmental advocacy organizations, to assist them. If "outsiders" intrude, community residents may refuse to listen to them or even display hostility toward them.	Residents seek outside assistance to address local environmental issues. For example, they may invite representatives of environmental advocacy groups into their community or seek to build alliances with other outside groups.
Level or types of concerns about environmental issues	Community has not experienced serious environmental impacts or incidents. Residents don't assume the worst when they hear of a chemical release or the discovery of	Community has experienced many or serious incidents or impacts (e.g., community is the location of a Superfund site). Response to subsequent incidents may seem out of

	<p>contamination. Although stakeholders may express concern and demand information on mitigation activities, the incident or discovery of contamination is not likely to result in the extreme anger that an arise in communities where residents view themselves as already unduly burdened by environmental problems.</p>	<p>proportion with actual effects due to cumulative anger over multiple impacts. Based on past experiences, residents may also assume that an impact (e.g., groundwater involvement) has occurred even if there is no such impact.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Residents may have good understanding of environmental cleanups, emissions control technologies, etc., from previous community outreach activities in conjunction with earlier incidents. If these previous outreach activities have been effective, subsequent communication is also likely to be effective.</p>
<p>Local newspaper coverage patterns</p>	<p>Local newspapers display objective reporting, seek to include views of all (or many) parties.</p> <p>Note that most newspapers have certain types of stories that they will cover heavily or patterns for handling such stories. For example, local newspapers may tie news of a new chemical release or the discovery of contamination to similar stories to create feature articles on “chemical threats in our community,” leading to significantly more coverage than a single incident might otherwise receive.</p>	<p>Local newspapers routinely cover environmental issues in terms of conflict. For example, factual reporting is secondary to casting the story as part of an ongoing environmental or community struggle.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Local newspapers avoid stories about conflict or stories that show local businesses in a negative light. Thus, certain environmental stories may receive no coverage. Note: This is actually NOT a good thing. If a major environmental issue does arise and isn’t covered by the local press, it will instead be relegated to informal communication channels and to rumors, complicating community outreach/public involvement efforts.</p>

<p>Identification and access to persons who need to be in the communication loop</p>	<p>Communication pathways in the community are fairly straightforward and include such easily identified “formal leaders” as the mayor, emergency responders, health department personnel, school district, etc. Informal leaders,” such as environmental organization representatives, neighborhood association leaders, etc. are also easily identified.</p> <p>Communication with formal and informal community leaders will ensure that messages get out to the public and that persons who are likely to be interviewed by the media will be able to make informed statements.</p>	<p>Existence of odd political situations with convoluted, difficult-to-discern allegiances and affiliations within the community. The order in which information is distributed during the community outreach process can be critical to avoid offending those higher up the “food chain.” Existence of formal and informal leaders who don’t share information or may use information to attack political opponents.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>Resistance among leaders in the “host” community about sharing information with stakeholders in other municipalities or jurisdictions who might also need to be included in the community outreach effort.</p>
<p>Level of inclusiveness, cohesiveness of community decision-making process</p>	<p>Information readily shared, decision-making process open to all stakeholders.</p> <p>Such communities often have many points of contact or many people asking to be involved in the communication loop. Such communities don’t tend to be marked by angry, disenfranchised stakeholder groups or excessively bitter political battles because everyone who has an interest in the issue can have a seat at the table. Note: Outreach in such communities can be demanding because of the amount of communication desired, but the likelihood of communicating effectively with all stakeholders is high.</p>	<p>Information and decision-making hoarded by a few “bosses.” Implementing effective public involvement and community outreach programs in such communities is often difficult because the “bosses” want to control the process. Extreme and combative activism may be present in such communities because residents have no other means to participate in the decision-making process. Note: Environmental Justice claims often arise in communities where some residents are locked out of the decision-making process.</p> <p>Or</p> <p>“Parallel communities,” in which certain</p>

		groups, split along economic, racial, or length of time in the community (e.g., new residents versus long-time residents), have their own opinion leaders, agendas, channels of communication, etc. that must be accommodated.
Preferences regarding third-party authorities or spokespersons	Stakeholders are well-disposed toward state and/or federal environmental agencies, college professors, medical/public health professionals, and the like. Residents will listen to some or all of these third-party experts.	Residents don't believe "government people," or think that anyone brought in by the facility has been "bought off." In some communities, residents have animosity toward "educated" people, such as college professors. Fortunately, doctors and representatives from public health agencies are often viewed as credible, even when all others are scorned.
Likelihood of community residents crossing municipal/county boundaries to weigh in on an environmental issue	Residents "stay put" and do not, as a rule, dabble in what is going on in "other areas." Note: How stakeholders define the boundaries of "their community" can vary tremendously—in some areas, residents consider the entire county "their community." Note: if an issue or an incident is perceived as affecting people across municipal or county boundaries, stakeholders are more likely to cross boundaries. For this reason, air issues have the ability to mobilize large numbers of people across municipal and county jurisdictions.	Residents routinely cross boundaries and view what goes on in other towns or counties as "their business"—and the people in the host community think that's perfectly natural. This can add complexity to the communication effort since community outreach personnel must consider the issues that outsiders might bring with them. Or Stakeholders attempt to cross boundaries to address an issue and the "host" community attempts to lock them out of the dialogue, resulting in acrimony and/or lawsuits.

Table adapted from, "Demystifying Public Environmental Concerns: Implementing Community Assessments," by Carol J. Forrest, *Environmental Quality Management*, Spring 1998.