

The Ladder of Citizen Participation

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1. Steps on the ladder

delegate
negotiate
consult meaningfully
consult pro forma
inform early
inform late
act secretly

2. “Rules” for the ladder

- a. Stay as low on the ladder as you can. Climb it only when you need input or you want to prevent or reduce outrage.
- b. When in doubt, climb the ladder.
- c. Don’t worry about participation creating conflict that wasn’t already there.
- d. Don’t promise more than you can deliver – and keep delivering.
- e. Remember that participation takes up-front time (and some money).
- f. Don’t use your inability to be at the top of the ladder as an excuse for staying at the bottom.
- g. If you *are* responding to public input, trumpet it – don’t hide it.
- h. Be as provisional as you can.

Note: The ladder (but not the “rules”) is adapted from Sherry R. Arnstein, “[A Ladder of Citizen Participation](#),” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, vol. 35, no. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224.

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