TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

1. **Take time at the beginning of the rule development process to identify all potential external stakeholders.** Include obvious stakeholders such as consumers, families, advocates and providers. But also consider the less obvious, for instance:
   - Universities and academics
   - Research groups
   - Other pertinent regulatory and service agencies in the state or province
   - Local government
   - Safety and sanitation experts
   - Transportation safety experts
   - Professional organizations
   - Medical and health professionals
   - Funders of service
   - Fire safety experts
   - Program experts

   Note that because of overlap, some of the special expertise needed may be supplied by a representative of a regulatory or service agency; this will help to keep the size of the group more manageable.

2. **Appoint one agency staff person as the key external spokesperson.** This assures that all external groups receive a consistent message throughout the process.

3. **Develop a detailed work plan that defines all of the steps in the rule formulation process and exactly how and when external stakeholders will be involved.** Make sure you know exactly at which points in your process stakeholders will be invited for input and how that process will be managed. Share the work plan with your stakeholders so that they have realistic expectations of the process. Frustration with the process can be minimized if stakeholders understand at the outset that this is a lengthy process that requires internal review of documents.

4. **Involve licensors, including inspectors, in the work groups and meetings with external stakeholders.** They can often help translate the front-line issues and concerns.

5. **Actively seek out participation from consumers and families of consumers.** While this can be the most challenging group to bring to the table, it can also be one of the most valuable. Suggestions for reaching individual consumers or families include:
6. **Involve a balanced representation of service providers.** Consider the groups to be regulated and think about how to make the distribution of your work group (% of representatives from various groups) roughly the same as the representation of those groups in your population. Consider variables such as:

- Rural, suburban, urban
- Faith based, profit or non-profit
- Cultural or socioeconomic differences
- Special program types
- Varied staffing levels
- Size of facility
- Publicly or privately funded
- Multiple or single-site operations
- Special program philosophies
- Etc.

7. **Provide many different avenues for participation.** Consider a mix of strategies such as written review and comment, written and telephone surveys on specific rule topics, work group meetings, individual provider visits and meetings, meetings with state and province-wide organizations, public hearings, local forums and so on.

8. **Listen, listen, listen.** If community participation is viewed as something you must do, rather than as a valuable step in assuring the most effective rules, it's sure to fail. Learn to truly value the process and to listen to what external stakeholders have to say.

9. **Be honest and open.** Develop a trusting and open relationship with external stakeholders where they feel they can ask questions and get an honest response. Make work group and public hearing participants feel comfortable, welcome and relaxed.

10. **Be willing to negotiate and compromise.** Attempt to find out what the “die on the sword” issues are for each stakeholder group and look for common ground. Wherever possible give each group something that is important to them. The final product should not represent any one group’s position (including the licensing agency), but rather a balance of all views and issues.

11. **Be willing to change draft rules.** Just because it is in the first draft does not mean it is necessarily the best, most appropriate position.
12. **Protect against biases in favor of or against any one group or individual.**
While this is an obvious principle, it’s still true that we often have strong beliefs in favor of or against certain program types, academic viewpoints, and so on. Recognize where your biases lie and guard against them. An effective process is dependent on listening to all commentators, regardless of personal views or the views of the licensing agency.

13. **Take the time (yes, it’s very time consuming) to collate and prepare a summary document.** Your summary document should include all public comments received, both written and oral. Group the comments by rule number or specific topic, listing all comments on one topic together. Identify each commentator by code rather than name to avoid biased decision making. Make your comment summaries available to the public.

14. **Know when it is time to move the process forward.** Just as community participation is essential to the rule formulation process.... it is equally essential not to over-do community participation. What does that mean?

   - While an effective, thorough (not rushed), well-balanced work group of participants can serve as a barometer and voice of the various needs and interests of the larger community, it is not necessary to involve every provider or consumer in each participant forum.

   - The community discussion is important, but it is equally important to **know when to end the process and move forward.** It is not realistic to expect full consensus; learn to judge when you have heard all concerns and then move forward with promulgation. Community participation is an important tool in the goal of developing effective rules, but it is not the end-goal. Getting effective rules promulgated to protect consumers is the end goal.