

NACCB 2020 Interactive Session Follow-Up Report

Session Title: Exploring the Continuum of Public Engagement in Conservation Science: Responsibility, Relationships & 'Life' Beyond the Manuscript

Keywords (3): conservation social science, public engagement, collaborative research

Activities:

In this 75 minute interactive session, we introduced and critically analyzed the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) framework, a tool for categorizing and thinking about the role of the public in research projects and processes. Our interactive session was well attended, with 30 participants, the maximum capacity we placed on the session. The first part of the session was a short presentation that served to clarify the role of the public at each level of engagement -- Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower-- using illustrative examples presented by members of the Human Dimensions Lab at University of Montana. Then, we used the "breakout room" function on Zoom to separate into five small groups lead by an HD Lab member. Our first break out session encouraged individuals in the session to share their research with one another, describing the level of public engagement they tend to have, and to consider the question, "How could the public engagement on your project be changed/enhanced by considering a different place on the Spectrum?" We reconvened briefly to "share out" from small groups and then, once again, broke out into small groups to think about another set of guiding questions that asked participants to think critically about what the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum does not represent well. We reconvened as a large group to discuss themes that came up during the small group sessions and ultimately, co-created a list of meaningful changes that could improve the IAP2 Spectrum.

Outcomes:

The small group breakout sessions, we felt, were successful in allowing participants to meet and network with others in a more intimate setting – something we believe is an invaluable aspect of academic conference participation and is often more challenging via the virtual platform. That said, we were pleasantly surprised by how well the video technology worked in effectively bringing participants together to from around the country, and the globe, to share in our discussion.

From the last portion of the session, which entailed large group brainstorming and visualization to re-imagine the IAP2 Spectrum, we were able to synthesize a list of themes, comments, and questions that could be used to improve this tool.

Comments and questions for improving the IAP2 Spectrum:

- *By being hierarchical in structure, there seems to be an embedded assumption in the framework that "Empower" is always a better approach to public engagement than "Involve" when in reality different communities and different projects call for different approaches. How can the IAP2 Framework better represent these "levels" as non-*

hierarchical? Ideas raised were including a circular or web-like design rather than a chart.

- *The “Empower” level was the most highly criticized and least clear category on the IAP2 Spectrum.*
- *How does the academic timeline and funding process conflict with the objective of doing ‘empowering’ community-led research? For example, comments were made that the standard timeline where researchers define research questions and proposals before spending sufficient time with communities to understand what questions and projects are important to them (and conducive to a research partnership) constrains research from actually being “empowering”*
- *How do you know if your research indeed lives up to its objectives of engagement? Of, for example, being “collaborative” or “empowering”? Can research claim to fall under one of these levels, yet fail to actually achieve outcomes? Could the IAP2 Framework integrate a temporal dimension that encourages researchers to reflect on public engagement at various research phases (before, during, after)?*
- *Relationships and decision-making power is always changing – the IAP2 Framework could somehow address the dynamic research process*

Questions to pair with an improved IAP2 Framework for researchers:

- *What does or will public engagement look like in my work? What level on the IAP2 Spectrum does it fit?*
- *Is this the most appropriate level for my work given my research questions and objectives? Could my work benefit the community I work with and my own understanding of my topic better by shifting to a different level of engagement?*
- *What are the constraints to public engagement in my work? How do the methods/methodologies I am using constrain or enable my work at this level?*

From the closing remarks, questions, and positive feedback we received, we felt that participants involved in this session left inspired to think critically about the diverse ways in which the public can be engaged in research. We also felt that participants left with lingering curiosity and interest in how the IAP2 Spectrum could be used as a tool to reflect on the role of the public in their own work.

Future Plans:

As a Lab, we plan to use the feedback we got from this session to build upon the IAP2 Spectrum to create a new framework for public engagement. We anticipate publishing an academic paper with our results!

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
					
GOAL	To provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and solutions.	To obtain stakeholder feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with stakeholders throughout the process to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are consistently understood.	To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision from development to solution.	Shared leadership of community-led projects with final decision-making at the community level.
STYLE	"Here's what's happening."	"Here are some options, what do you think?"	"Here's a problem, what ideas do you have?"	"Let's work together to solve this problem."	"You care about this issue and are leading an initiative, how can we support you?"

Adapted from the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

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