USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

Public Engagement Reference Guide for Forest Service Employees

Forest Service FS-1117 August 2019

Mt. Henry from Forest Road 92, Kootenai National Forest in Montana. USDA Forest Service photo.

Acknowledgments

There are many individuals in the Forest Service and partners that have informed the need for sharing and learning around the practice of public engagement. They have served as valued reviewers, collaborators, and practitioners of employing well tested and innovative ways of meaningful engagement with the public. We very much appreciate all of the candid feedback provided by these individuals on various successive drafts of this public engagement reference guide that led to an improved product. As with most public engagement efforts, this reference guide has had its own journey.

We would like to thank all members of the Senior Leader Program (SLP) 11 Action Learning Team, the team sponsor, team champion, and the Ecosystem Management Coordination Planning staff for hosting the finalization of this guide.

SLP11 Action Learning Team: Maia J. Enzer, Chad VanOrmer, Katie O'Connor, Joseph Krueger, Joseph Donnegan, Alicia Bell-Sheeter, Julian Affuso, and Roger Hepburn; Champion and Sponsor: Beth Pendleton (retired); Chris French, National Forest System Associate Deputy Chief; and Post-SLP Project Host: Andrea Bedell-Loucks, Assistant Director for Ecosystem Management Coordination.

The National Senior Leader Program (SLP) is a competency-based training program for employees who have a driving interest in enhancing their leadership behaviors and who have demonstrated the ability to progress into a senior leader role. As part of the yearlong program, participants form Action Learning Teams and are tasked with completing a capstone project with the goal of pushing the learning edge for the agency as a whole. A small team formed around a shared passion for exploring meaningful and effective ways of bringing diverse voices into a conversation about stewarding our Nation's natural resources. As a result, a prototype of this guidebook was initially developed and piloted by our SLP 11 Action Learning Team cohort. Subsequent to the completion of the SLP11, a small group decided to take the prototype and develop it into this public engagement reference guide for continued sharing and learning.

Cover photo: Personnel from the USDA Forest Service and partner agencies discuss lessons learned from the 2016 Mormon Fire on the Coconino National Forest in Arizona. USDA Forest Service photo by Brady Smith.

Foreword

Since its roots in Gifford Pinchot's office in Milford, PA, and during more than a century of change, the Forest Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has operated under a mandate of public service. Whether managing the Nation's natural resources to contribute toward the economic livelihood of communities, for the clean air and water that they provide, for recreation, or the protection of Indian sacred sites, the ultimate service has been and remains to provide for the "public good."

In service to the public, Pinchot outfitted early foresters with a set of guidelines that are as relevant today as they were when he laid them out at the turn of the century. His maxims to guide foresters in public office include the need to engage with and consult the public, to understand their needs and interests, and to interact with honesty and humility. Key to the "public good" is the public—not just the people of the Nation at large, but forest neighbors, be they Tribes, local governments, nonprofit organizations, academia, or recreational and commercial users of the land.

As Forest Service employees, we continue that philosophy today. Our agency's mission to "sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations" is key to our commitment to work with partners to achieve "the greatest good of the greatest number."

At the Forest Service, we work through partnerships that seek to create communication and collaboration across jurisdictional and cultural boundaries. Our ethic of working together reinforces community bonds, strengthens our Nation's social fabric, and fosters community prosperity. By building stronger relationships and reaching out to underserved communities, who may not have historically had a voice in the management of national forests and grasslands, we can more effectively steward our National Forest System lands through honoring all the communities we serve.

To that end, this Public Engagement Reference Guide is intended as a means to help guide the management of natural resources in a more inclusive, better informed way. We hope that it is useful to both Forest Service staff and the communities we serve.

"Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success."
— Henry Ford

Guiding Questions

These guiding questions are to help you think through and select components that will shape and drive how you, your unit, or your leadership will approach public engagement. There are no right or wrong answers. These questions are meant to stimulate your inquiry so you can be intentional in choosing the best approach for your local situation. Exploring the questions will help you design and implement meaningful, effective, and efficient engagement for the agency and for those you engage. The questions are linked to related sections that include more detailed information to support your efforts.

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Members of the collaborative group on a field tour of the Grandfather Restoration Project on the Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina. Photo credit: https://grandfatherrestorationproject.wordpress.com/

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service motto is "Caring for the Land and Serving People" and can best be accomplished by focusing on valuing people and places. Because we are entrusted with the stewardship of our Nation's forest and grasslands, we believe relationships matter and that citizens from all walks of life should have the opportunity to be engaged in that stewardship. We trust that by working together through partnerships, collaboration, and community involvement, we can maintain, restore, and manage productive lands, healthy ecosystems, resilient communities, and meaningful public engagement.

This guide does not touch on every practice, resource, rule, or regulation that supports effective engagement. We recognize that the practice of public engagement is a skilled discipline attained through experience that develops and changes as the issues and tools for engagement evolve. Effective engagement will take resources, talent, and, most of all, a deep commitment to build our skills and systems to meet the new work of public engagement.

Public engagement for the Forest Service is the process of interacting with citizens about the stewardship of their public lands using a variety of methods, approaches, and tools to create meaningful experiences that support their relationship with the land, the agency, and each other.

Purpose

This guide provides concise descriptions of the most common terms and latest approaches to public engagement. Developing fluency and consistency in the terms related to public engagement will allow the full spectrum of agency employees and others to choose the most useful approach to meet their specific goals and local context. This quick reference can also serve as a way to begin conversations—internally and externally—and choose the most effective public engagement strategy to meet a specific need.

Why Do You Want To Engage?

Knowing why you want to engage a particular community or segment of the public will improve the quality and efficiency of your public engagement work. There are many ways to engage with the public. Public engagement is not static. How you engage will vary depending on your reasons. For example, you may want to engage youth in a summer project, do a fuels reduction project along a favorite community trail, explore a research question to advance science, seek solutions to an invasive insect outbreak, or involve people in something complex, such as a large landscape restoration project or forest plan revision. Engagement happens in all of these different types of activities with varying degrees of intensity. The Spectrum of Public Engagement is a simple tool to help you get clear on why you want to engage the public and how you want them to engage with the agency. For a particular engagement strategy, several processes in the spectrum may be utilized.

Table 1. Spectrum of Public Engagement

Process	Why	How	When
Inform	Keep stakeholders informed; maintain transparency.	Provide sufficient objective information to the public to facilitate an understanding of intended actions, processes, and preliminary issues. **Example actions:** Factsheets, news releases, Federal Register notices, websites, email announcements, or webinars.	Have new actions planned. Have new information. Have made noncontroversial decisions.
Consult	Seek input to identify issues that need to be addressed. Test the waters: get reactions to a proposed action early in the planning process. Address misinformation or misperceptions.	Provide information to the public and seek suggestions, as well as feedback, on potential issues and concerns. **Example actions:** Open houses, public meetings, listening sessions, field trips, online comment web page, etc.	Have questions about stakeholders' concerns and interests. Know stakeholders may have questions, misinformation, or misperceptions about planned actions.
Involve	Seek advice by discussing issues and ideas. Ensure stakeholders' concerns and recommendations are understood and considered. Bring more technical information into the discussion.	Work closely with interested members of the public to clarify concerns and seek feedback on how to meet challenges presented by the planning process. Involve stakeholders during project implementation. **Example actions:** Meetings with individuals or groups representing specific interests, workshops, Chartered Federal Advisory Committees, Tribal consultation, etc.	Know planned actions are more complex or may be controversial. Unsure of best way to proceed. Need to bring in other subject matter experts for targeted input during planning and/or implementation of a project.
Collaborate	Seek to create agreement by tapping into the expertise and creativity of many. Identify areas of common ground. Identify mutually acceptable solutions. Build broad support for decisions. Move forward in controversial situations.	Directly engage the public to exchange information with each other and work together on one or more issues during the planning process. Identify where there is agreement and disagreement. **Example actions:** Work with the public to assess needs, identify goals, develop monitor, and evaluate projects. Work with the public through citizen led collaborative groups, task forces, collaborative planning teams, collaborative forest landscape restoration groups, etc.	Have complex issues. Have potential for conflict or controversy. Aware of lack of support for or likely opposition to planned actions.

This table has been adapted and modified from the "Spectrum of Public Engagement in NEPA Decision Making" in *Collaboration in NEPA: A Handbook for NEPA Practitioners*, Council on Environmental Quality (October 2007:13) and the International Association for Public Participation—IAP2 Federation's "Public Participation Spectrum," which can be found at https://www.iap2.org.au/.

Whom Do You Want To Engage?

There are many different types of organizations, groups, and people who are interested in the management of their public lands. And, there are even more people who care about nature and the value of a healthy environment to their quality of life or the success of their business. Effective engagement depends on meeting people where they are, talking with them about what they care about, and making connections to how their public lands provide the multiple benefits that society and their local community seek. Relationships are the anchors for effective engagement. Knowing whom you want to engage, what their interests are, and why you want to engage them is vital to building effective relationships. Taking the time to think through why you want to engage with a particular group or community will assist you in tailoring your engagement to best reach that group. Knowing more about whom you are engaging will enable you to choose the best tools and activities to engage them, increasing your effectiveness and using everyone's time efficiently. Figure 1 provides examples of group categories to think through when designing your engagement approach.

Participants at public meeting on the Fossil Creek Comprehensive River Management Plan. USDA Forest Service photo by Deborah Lee Soltesz.

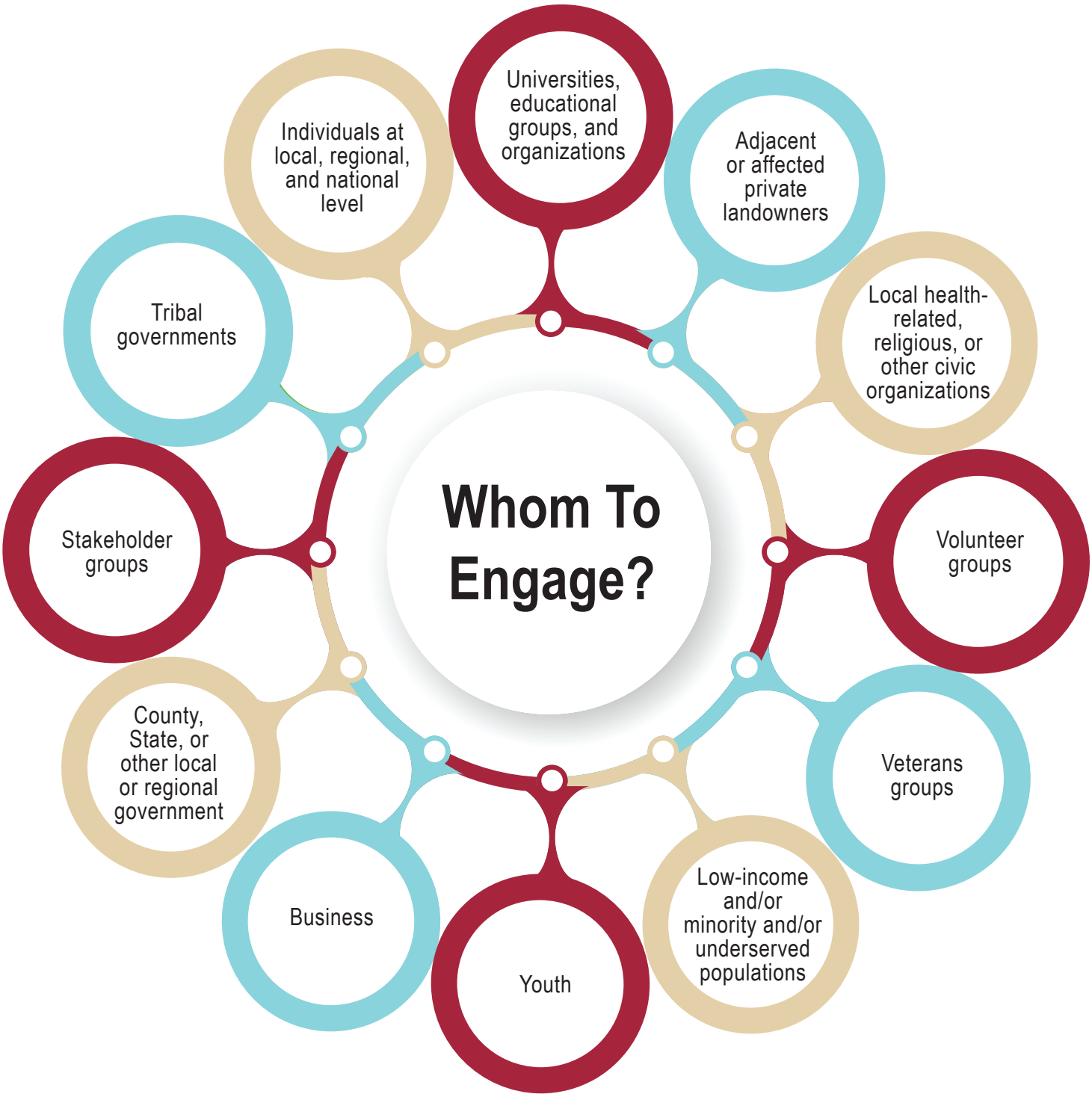

Figure 1. Examples of categories of groups to engage.

How Can Partners and Collaboration Help You Engage?

Partners can help design and implement your engagement approach. Sometimes, the agency is better participating, rather than leading the dialogue. For example, formal partnerships can be put in place to solicit community feedback, commit to combine resources to implement a project, agree on how and when to engage, or increase understanding of local social, economic, or cultural issues, among other topics. Examples of the types of groups to consider partnerships with include, but are not limited to, collaborative and multi-stakeholder groups, watershed councils, community-based and civic organizations, local governments, and associations representing specific interest groups.

The use of collaborative processes is increasing as a way to solve seemingly intractable natural resource management problems. Within the context of land management planning, the 2012 Planning Rule defines collaboration or collaborative process as "a structured manner in which a collection of people with diverse interests share knowledge, ideas, and resources while working together in an inclusive and cooperative manner toward a common purpose."* Aligned with that definition, but inclusive of some broader concepts, collaborative process is often described as diverse entities working together to solve shared problems, develop projects, and/or achieve outcomes using open, transparent, and inclusive approaches and decision making that rely on consensus or other general agreements.

Collaborative processes can be used within an organization, between organizations, in inter- and intra-governmental projects or programs, and between governmental and nongovernmental entities. Generally, good collaborative processes use: (1) open and transparent decision making; (2) fair, clear, and inclusive participation and representation; (3) effective facilitation and management of group processes; (4) consideration of biological and social sciences, economics, and local and traditional knowledge to inform dialogue and agreements; and (5) monitoring as a way to ensure continual learning.

Along with the use of collaborative processes, there is an emergence of collaborative groups. Collaborative groups are generally citizen led, comprised of diverse interests, and focused on finding common ground to achieve shared objectives or resolve commonly perceived problems.

Collaborative groups are not controlled or led by Forest Service employees, although their active nonvoting participation is encouraged by Forest Service leadership and policy, often expected by community members and partners, and needed for success. The work of these collaborative groups, their processes, projects, and agreements do not supplant formal public involvement requirements or government-to-government (Tribal) or inter- or intra-agency agreements. Collaborative groups often do provide meaningful opportunities for engagement between diverse interests, particularly in place-based situations, enabling increased understanding, trust, innovation, and problem solving that is broadly supported.

**National Forest System Land Management Planning; 36 CFR § 219.19. p. 83.*

What Principles Can Guide You?

Principles provide guideposts that serve as the foundation for what we believe. Effective relationships with the public are essential for the us to do our work for the Forest Service. The following engagement principles and supporting behaviors are offered as a framework to ground yourself in how you want to show up when you are working with the public.

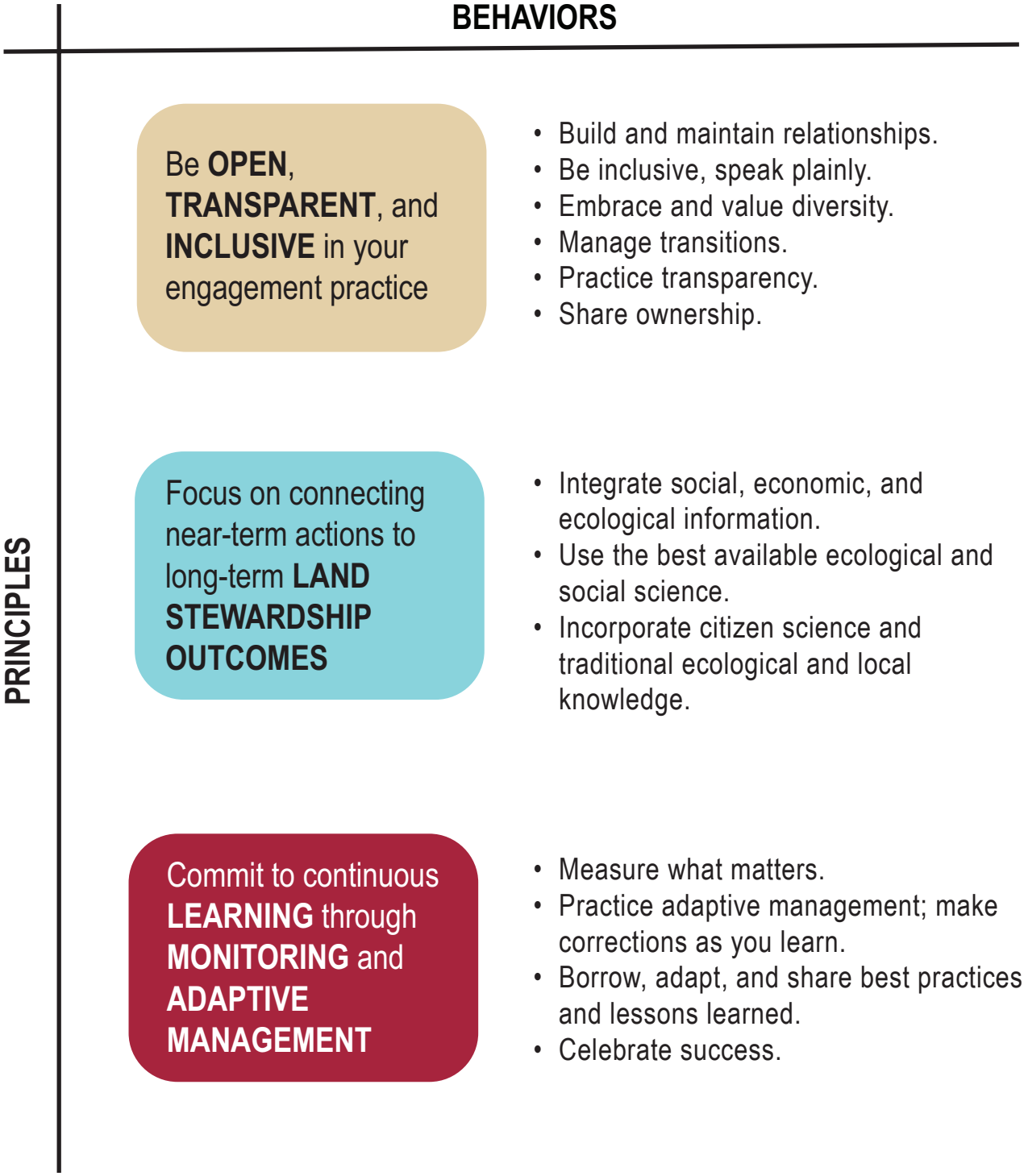

Figure 2. Engagement principles and supporting behaviors.

Which Methods Best Fit Your Situation?

Table 2. Methods

Terms	Description	Whom To Engage Externally
Community Relations	Creating and maintaining relationships with citizens, local businesses, civic organizations, schools, universities, local government, and others to function effectively in a community as part of day-to-day operations.	Formal and informal local leadership; natural resource focused groups; youth groups; local businesses; groups who don't traditionally engage; low income, underrepresented, and/or underserved populations.
Outreach	Increasing awareness, interest, and engagement among specific populations within a community through general and targeted efforts by providing information about the Forest Service. Outreach methods may relate to diversity and inclusion, recruitment and retention, and engagement and participation goals or objectives.	Traditional and nontraditional organizations, groups, institutions, and persons who are presently working with and trusted by the communities of focus for the outreach.
Public Participation	Conducting open, ongoing, two-way communication, both formal and informal, with agency stakeholders—those interested in or affected by its actions. Public participation provides a structured process for the agency to solicit feedback and input into a specific proposed action or decision through public comment periods.	The public, which includes all non-governmental individuals who may be interested or affected by land management and natural resources decisions. Be fully inclusive and involve youth, nontraditional, and under-represented populations.
Government Relations	Forming relationships with employees from another government entity to identify mutually beneficial reasons to work together. Partnerships with county and Tribal governments and Federal and State regulatory agencies are especially important.	County, State, and Tribal government officials and agency staff that have expertise and/or specific interests in public lands management. Also important are relationships with local congressional offices, which are vital to ensuring a positive and supportive political environment.
Collaborative Process	Working together with diverse individuals or groups through a process to develop a project or plan, solve a common problem, or achieve a shared outcome using approaches that employ egalitarian, consensus, and/or other decision-making protocols. Collaboration can be used within an organization, between organizations, in inter- and intra- governmental projects or programs, and between governmental and non-governmental entities.	Citizen-led groups of diverse interests focused on finding common ground to achieve a shared objective or resolve a commonly perceived problem. Often these are referred to as "collaborative groups." Groups convened to bring together Federal, State, local, and/or Tribal governments.
Citizen Science	Benefiting from voluntary public participation in the scientific process to form research questions, conduct scientific experiments, collect and analyze data, interpret results, make discoveries, develop technologies and applications, and solve complex real-world problems. Crowdsourcing involves an open call for volunteers to provide information or help solve a problem. A large group of individuals ("the crowd") responds, usually through the use of mobile or online apps. Crowdsourcing can be a form of citizen science depending on application.	Volunteers, forest visitors, communities and businesses, friends' groups, collaborative groups, research universities, nonprofit organizations (wildlife, recreation, etc.), youth groups.
Multiparty Monitoring	Employing a process that involves discussion and mutual learning among individuals representing different groups and interests. It differs from other forms of monitoring in that the participation of citizens in defining the questions and, in some instances, being involved in collecting the data is central to the activity.	Agency personnel alongside stakeholders of different backgrounds and perspectives.

GIS = Geographic information system. NEPA = National Environmental Policy Act. NFMA = National Forest Management Act.

Public engagement is a practice. Try different methods and assess whether you are meeting your stated purposes for engaging. It matters how, when, and whom you engage. Over the last 20 years, the arena of public engagement approaches has expanded. A certain project or initiative may involve several different approaches at different phases or simultaneously. There are many available tools and techniques aimed at making public engagement more effective. Public engagement is based in the social science of how to effectively work with people to enable their participation in a manner that is meaningful to them and the issue at hand. As we deepen our efforts at the Forest Service to engage urban and rural communities, use contemporary and traditional methods, and manage the ever-increasing number of issues and topics the public cares about, we must also increase our fluency in the tools of engagement. Table 2 is designed to provide an at-a-glance format to understand the various terms and methods.

Benefits of Approach	When to Use	Typically Involved
Builds trust, visibility, and increased understanding of how natural and managed places benefit society.	Everyday	All employees.
Connects community members, especially those underserved or underrepresented in Forest Service programs and employment, to the role of the agency, how it impacts their lives, and how they can become more involved through employment, volunteerism, participation, or partnership.	Trying to increase the engagement, participation, employment, or volunteerism of a specific population.	Depending on circumstances, public affairs officers, public involvement specialists, front liners, etc.
Ensures all Americans have an opportunity to engage in natural resources decisions and encourages use of a wide spectrum of approaches by using a sequence of communication and engagement processes.	Seeking to inform, communicate, engage in discussion, or grow a relationship regarding natural resources issues affecting the public. When soliciting public input into a proposed action or decision, as prescribed during the processes associated with NEPA and NFMA.	Public affairs officers, line officers, interdisciplinary team leaders and specialists.
Establishes relationships and partnerships with elected officials and Tribal, county, and State agency representatives; improves communication and mutual sharing of knowledge and ideas; creates opportunities to share and leverage resources; enhances coordination; and provides a venue for joint problem solving.	Everyday. This should be part of line officers' community relationship approach and integrated into the way a forest or region conducts business.	Line officers, regional executives and directors, with support from public affairs officers and specialists.
Assembles diverse interests and entities and provides a venue and process to work together to find solutions. Creates shared ownership. Collaboration can be particularly effective when issues are complex, extremes of opinions are driving public discourse, and there is an opportunity to bring people together to identify common ground and develop shared ownership of outcomes.	When an issue/problem is multifaceted and there is not a simple fix or multiple entities have a vested interest or jurisdiction on the topic. Working alone will not be effective or efficient over the long term.	Line officers, specialists, partnership coordinators, collaboration specialists.
Builds understanding and trust through increased transparency between the community, scientists, and decision makers about social aspects in environmental issues. Connects diverse and underserved audiences to the land in a meaningful way. Gathers large quantities of high-quality data that informs land management. Builds better understanding between the community, scientists, and decision makers about social aspects in environmental issues.	Increasing learning, understanding, and dialogue with the public around scientific information and policy, creating pathways for training and employment, and encouraging public input and stewardship.	Researchers, volunteer coordinators, conservation educators, resource specialists, public affairs officers, GIS specialists, forest planners, and collaboration specialists.
Builds mutual understanding, accountability, and trust by focusing on data gathered through a collaborative process.	Involving high distrust of traditional monitoring or interest in understanding impacts of new or contentious management decisions.	Line officers, specialists, collaborative group members, Tribes, interest groups, youth, concerned citizens.

Which Approaches Best Fit Your Needs?

Table 3. Approaches

Terms	Description	What It Does
Partnership & Collaboration Strategy	A written strategy that expresses the values and leadership intent (BIG WHY) for partnerships and collaborative relationships and documents: (1) recognizes current relationships, (2) identifies priority issues and opportunities, and (3) prioritizes or sequences partnership opportunities to align with the unit's program of work. A strategy will also evaluate and document the impacts of collaborative and partnership efforts.	Identifies existing and potential organizations that represent interested communities, stakeholders, youth, underserved or underrepresented populations, county government, Tribes, research organizations, and/or State government entities that the unit can partner with to achieve mutually beneficial goals and shared objectives.
Communication Strategy	A plan that describes the objectives (BIG WHY) for engagement and defines items such as key messages, audience, and timeline. This can be tailored to address a specific project or incident or a more long-term strategic goal.	Assigns roles and responsibilities for communicating and engaging. Defines milestones for assessing whether the strategy is effective.
Partnership Agreements	A voluntary arrangement entered into for the purpose of accomplishing mutually agreed upon objective(s), related to the instruments and authorities listed in FSH 1509.11, chapter 70; FSM 1580.5. Note: There are many types of agreements that use different authorities: partnerships, joint ventures, cooperative, participating, cost-share, stewardship, Memorandum of Agreements/Understanding, etc. Each instrument defines the terms of the relationship and transactions.	Codifies the expected roles, responsibilities, and terms of mutual benefit and sets the terms of any financial leverage or transaction involved.
Federal Advisory Committees	Committees created by the Federal Government under the authority of the FACA (Pub. L. 92–463, 86 Stat. 770, enacted October 6, 1972). A FACA Committee is chartered to provide advice on topics chosen by the host agency, which also defines the charter, selects members, defines the term of service and scope of work, and pays for management of the committee.	Gets/obtains consensus advice or recommendations from a group that the agency establishes, utilizes, controls, or manages. Generally, these groups focus on programs and/ or policies that are controversial and/or require special expertise or representation from diverse stakeholder groups.
NFMA Coordination	NFMA requires that the Forest Service coordinates its land management planning processes (not plans) with State and local planning processes (not plans) (16 U.S.C. 1604 (a)). The 2012 Planning Rule requires the agency to coordinate its land management planning with "the equivalent and related planning efforts of Federally Recognized Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other Federal agencies, and State and local governments." 36 CFR § 219.4.	Addresses common objectives and creates greater synergy between state/local community and agency planning efforts. Encourages responsible official to engage State and local government early in the planning process. Includes review of the plans and policies of State and local government and publication of that review in the EIS.
NEPA Cooperation	The process by which Federal, State, local, and Tribal government serve as cooperating agencies to provide special expertise in the NEPA process.	Requires that a Federal agency "cooperate with State and local agencies to the fullest extent possible to reduce duplication between NEPA and State and local requirements." 40 CFR § 1506.2. Enables the designation of cooperating agency status to any agency other than a lead Federal agency, which has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved in a proposal.
Tribal Consultation	Timely, meaningful, and substantive dialogue between USDA officials who have delegated authority to consult and the official leadership of Federally Recognized Indian Tribes, or their designated representative(s), pertaining to USDA policies that may have Tribal implications.	Provides a mechanism for consultation. For USDA, consultation may only be conducted by employees who have delegated authority. For the Tribes, consultation is conducted by elected Tribal representatives or Tribal employees or designees who have delegated authority from their Tribal government for consultation. This delegation is determined by the Tribes themselves as sovereign governments.

CFR = Code of Federal Regulations. EIS = Environmental Impact Statement. FACA = Federal Advisory Committee Act. FSH = Forest Service Handbook. FLMPA = Federal Land Policy and Management Act. FSM = Forest Service Manual. ID = Identification. NEPA = National Environmental Policy Act. NFMA = National Forest Management Act. U.S.C. = United States Code. USDA = United States Department of Agriculture.

The Forest Service has a variety of approaches such as strategies, designations, and processes that can define and formalize relationships and ways to engage. Using the right approach can help you enhance the clarity of roles and responsibilities, manage expectations, and provide ample opportunities to share and leverage resources. Codifying relationships and expectations creates continuity and improves the transition process when personnel involved with the partnership change. Since establishing formal mechanisms takes time and resources, you should evaluate whether the time for formalizing your approach will be proportional to the shared objectives. You do not have to enter into a formal agreement to be involved in a robust, active partnership. You do need an instrument in place, however, anytime money is being exchanged or volunteers are being hired.

Benefits	When	Typically Involved
Enables the unit to understand the current state of its relationships in a holistic manner. Enables leadership to strategically create and recognize opportunity, prioritize staff time to engage critical relationships, and potentially sequence engagement activities to maximize partnership opportunities to leverage human and financial capital.	Annually or as needed, depending on the length of time the strategy covers.	Forest leadership team, partnership coordinator, collaboration specialist, social scientists, partners.
Creates alignment in how communication and engagement happens. It is clear and intentional.	Working toward a common goal on a shared project with multiple internal and/or external stakeholders; project-level planning and implementation; or forest plan revisions.	Public affairs officers, interdisciplinary team leaders, line officers, station directors and scientists.
Enables groups to work together on shared interests and leverages partners' skills and resources through voluntary relationships between people, organizations, agencies, and communities. Partnership can include working with universities, nonprofit organizations, watershed councils, and other nongovernmental entities, as well as other State, county, and Federal agencies.	Strengthening mutually beneficial goals and leveraging human or financial resources through a formal arrangement. Especially helpful and important when wanting to share financial or human resources to achieve similar outcomes, as well as when wanting to define terms of a partnership or financial arrangements over multiple years.	Grants and agreement specialists, partnership coordinators, program specialists, and scientists.
Formalizes and structures how the agency works with a selected group of individuals to get consensus advice or recommendations.	Working formally with selected group of individuals within an agency to receive consistent and needed advice on a specific technical issue, program, or policy over a period of time.	Designated Federal official that manages the advisory committee and is the primary liaison and supporting technical staff.
Requires the Forest Service give major planning and management consideration to potential impacts of agency plans on State and local plans and land use programs for Indian Tribes. Coordination does not mean the agency will defer to or convey decision making to another entity.	Completing in the context of NFMA. Coordination is also done in the context of working with other agencies or Tribes to align outcomes and minimize surprises.	Line officers; public affairs officers.
Ensures that Tribes and/or other government agencies can contribute special expertise in the NEPA process and helps to reduce duplication between State and local requirements. Having Cooperating Agency Status does not confer decision-making authority; final decisions remain with the agency with jurisdiction.	Recognizing another agency is critical to the NEPA analysis process.	Line officers; ID team leads, public affairs officers.
Informs, enhances communication, and provides key input on natural resource issues faced by Tribal and Federal Government leaders.	Working with Tribes on critical resource issues.	Agency employees with delegated authority to consult and Tribal representatives with delegated authority to consult.

What Tools Best Fit Whom and Why You Want To Engage?

Using the right tools to engage the specific groups you are seeking to develop relationships with is important to effective and efficient public engagement. There is no single or correct tool or activity to use; rather, there are many that you can employ or work with a partner to implement. Over time, you may use many different tools and activities depending on how the community you are reaching out to responds in your local setting. Figure 3 offers a list of tools you can consider and integrate into your public engagement efforts.

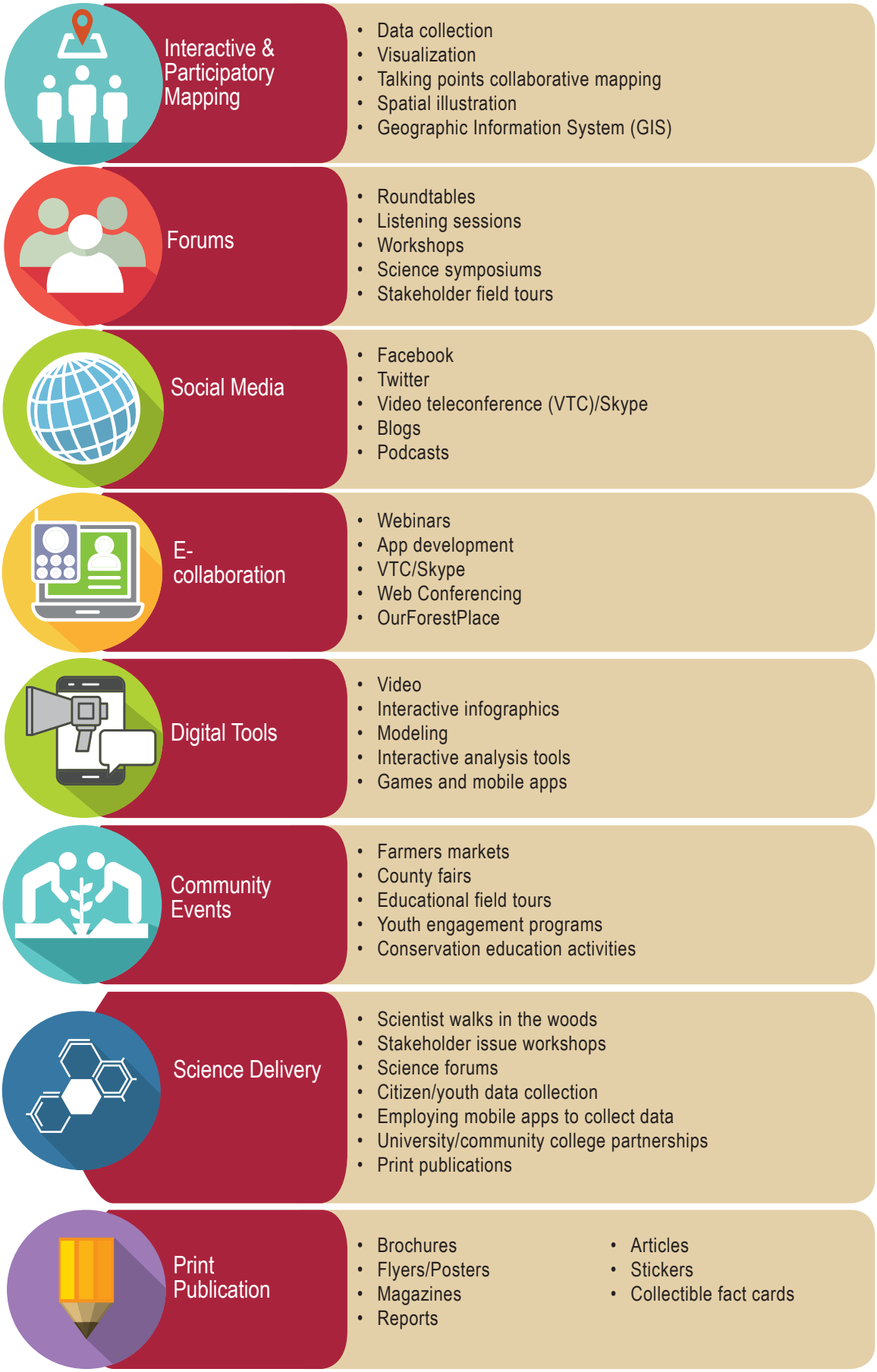

Figure 3. Tools to support engagement.

What Is the Federal Advisory Committee Act?

The 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) is an important law passed to ensure citizen involvement in Federal decisions is equitable, that no one individual or group has undue influence.

The simplest way to comply with FACA is to host meetings with non-Federal employees who are "open to all" and transparent. In addition, make clear to all participants that the agency, by law, must value insights from each individual and organization separately and equitably AND must not rely solely on any single individual or group perspective when making agency decisions. Doing this isn't always easy, so here are useful principles and best practices related to FACA compliance.

When Does FACA Apply?

- A Federal agency must comply with FACA when it (1) establishes, utilizes,* controls, or manages (2) a group with non-Federal members† that (3) provides the agency with consensus advice or recommendations.
- Only groups that meet all three of these legal elements are subject to FACA.
- A definitive determination about whether FACA applies to a particular group is a fact-specific inquiry that generally requires consultation with the USDA's Office of General Counsel.

Best Practices for Avoiding FACA Violations

- Help participants understand how to work with the Forest Service in a FACA-compliant manner.
- Ensure that Forest Service staff and external stakeholders understand what constitutes consensus advice or recommendations under FACA:
    - » Individual group members can provide their own personal opinions, advice, or recommendations without implicating FACA.
    - » This is true even if several individual members of a group provide similar or identical opinions, advice, or recommendations.
- Do not solicit consensus advice or recommendations from a group that was established, utilized, managed, or controlled by the Forest Service.
- Inform (orally and in writing) members of a group that was established, utilized, managed, or controlled by the Forest Service that the agency cannot obtain the group's consensus advice or recommendations without triggering FACA.
- Seek advice or recommendations from interested stakeholders only after making clear that the agency is not asking the group to reach consensus or to provide only consensus advice.
- Ensure that collaborative meetings are open to the public and properly advertised in advance.
- Keep detailed minutes of all collaborative meetings.
- Make all records, reports, transcripts, minutes, and other information related to a collaborative group publicly available.

Note:*This section is taken from "Key Principles and Practical Advice for Complying With the Federal Advisory Committee Act" (November 2011). The original document can be found at the Forest Service Partnership Resource Center at https://www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us.*

** Under FACA, the term "utilize" does not have its ordinary meaning. Instead, FACA's regulations provide that an agency "utilizes" a group only when it exercises actual management or control over a group's operations (41 CFR §102-3.25).*

† The Uniform Mandates Reform Act of 1995 provides a limited exemption from FACA for certain groups of Federal employees and elected officers of State, local, and Tribal governments (or their properly designated employees) acting in their official capacity. See 2 U.S.C. § 1534(b).

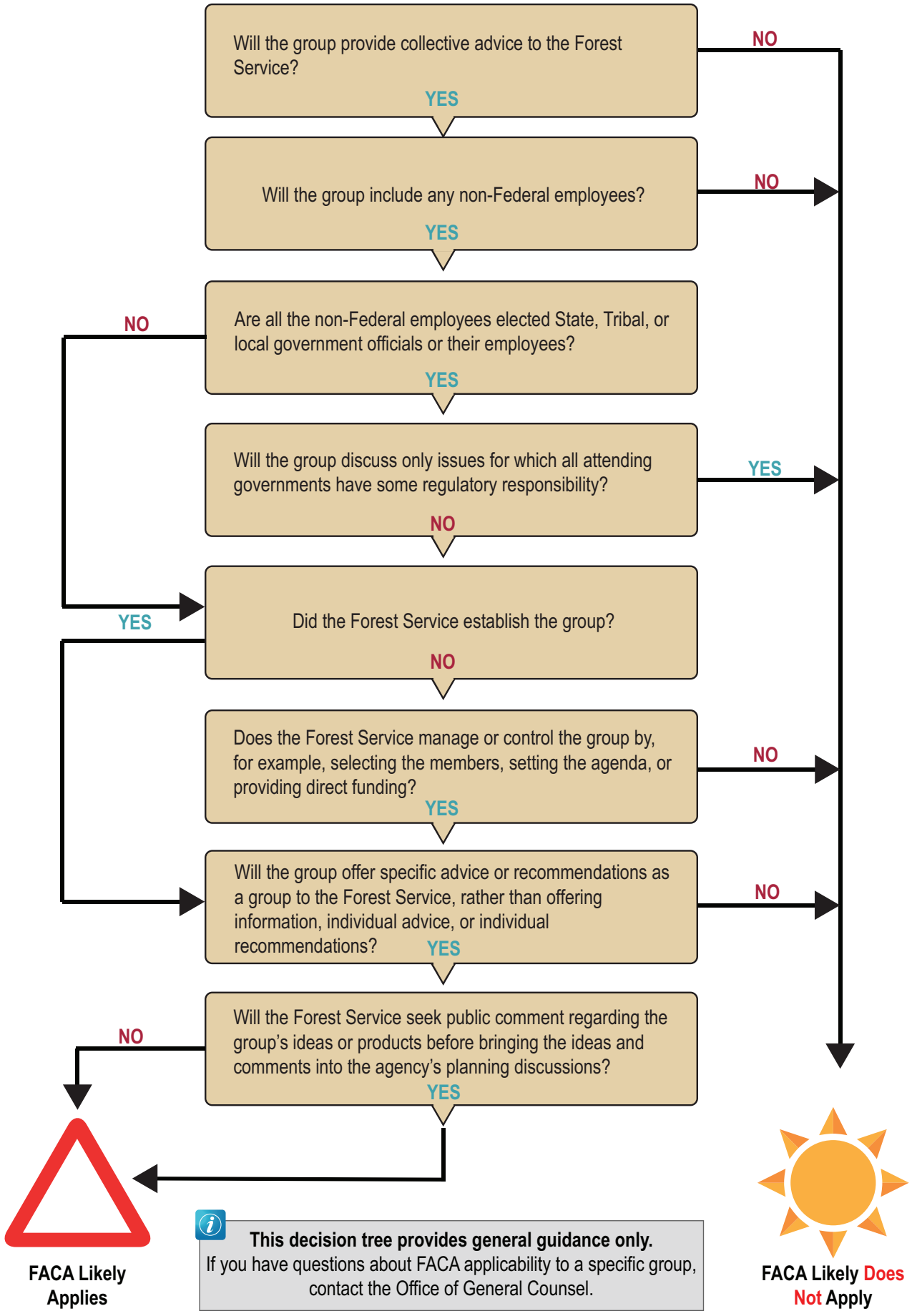

Figure 4. Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) flowchart.

The Forest Service has developed this information for the guidance of its employees. The agency assumes no responsibility for the interpretation or use of this information by anyone except its own employees. This administrative document does not establish new requirements for collaboration or public involvement and is intended to be a general reference guide, not official policy.

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