Information Gathering Mechanisms
For Use in Engaging the Community and Gathering Feedback

Approach	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages / Barriers	Other Considerations
Community Meetings	Broad, inclusive community meeting – often called a "town hall" meeting. Open discussion among a large group of participants. Can be conducted multiple times in larger communities.	✍Can reach a large number of people. ✍Helps to publicize the process as well as get community input.	✍Requires a great deal of promotion to get broad community involvement. ✍Some individuals/groups may dominate the discussion or "pack" the meeting.	Requires a strong facilitator. Discussions can be incorporated into the agendas of already-existing town meetings.
Community Dialogues For a description of this process, see Tip Sheet – Conducting a Community Dialogue	Smaller (20-35 people) gatherings where all/many sectors of the community are represented. May be conducted with multiple groups.	✍Useful for exploring complex issues in greater depth. ✍Useful for engaging less-enfranchised sectors of the community.	✍Some individuals or groups may dominate the discussion. ✍Group atmosphere may hinder honest opinions.	Requires a strong facilitator.
Focus Groups For a description, see Tip Sheet – A Step by Step Approach to Conducting Focus Groups	A small group of participants (generally 8-10) that responds to a set number of questions. Useful for providing specific direction and/or reactions to concepts from targeted groups (i.e., identified subpopulations).	✍Participants react to ideas together – can build off of each other's comments. ✍Quick way to hear a variety of thoughts and statements. ✍Shared experience, therefore, can be enjoyable	✍Some individuals may dominate the discussion. ✍Group atmosphere may hinder honest opinions. ✍Only a small number of people can realistically participate.	Requires a good deal of preparation and a good facilitator.
Walking or Windshield Surveys See Clarkston Vignette – Windshield Survey for a description (under development)	Conducted by driving or walking around the community and taking note of aspects of the community that can be seen with the eyes. Helps to identify assets (i.e., a small pond where children swim that offers a recreation site) or unrecognized issues (i.e., potholes).	✍Requires only a small number of people to conduct the survey. ✍Can bring new awareness of community assets or issues.	✍Requires an open mind to identify previously unrecognized assets/ issues.	Fairly easy to conduct, but should not be the only mechanism used for information-gathering. Good supplement to other mechanisms.

Photovoice See Clarkston Vignette – Photovoice for a description (under development)	A small group of people (8-10) walks through the community taking pictures of things that strike them. A collective presentation or book is produced with text describing issues and opportunities	✎Particularly attractive to youth ✎Builds teamwork within group ✎Presentations engage larger group ✎A picture is worth a thousand words	✎Requires open mind to identify assets and issues. ✎Some important assets can't be photographed.	Easily done but takes strong mentoring if youth are involved. Good supplement to other mechanisms.
Individual Discussions / Interviews	Individual discussions — through informal discussions or formal interviews — can gather in-depth feedback from representative community members. Can be done with key community leaders or residents representing specific subpopulations.	✎Can build awareness of MAPP process. ✎Gathers in-depth input and feedback in an open setting. ✎Easy to implement	✎Only a small number of people can realistically participate. ✎May put undue emphasis on "pet" issues of interviewees.	Fairly easy to conduct, but this should not be the only mechanism used for information-gathering. Good supplement to other mechanisms.
Surveys See Example Community Survey	Can include written, telephone, or in-person surveys. A traditional approach to gathering community input.	✎Useful for reaching large numbers of people. ✎Can scope out issues raised in other areas of the process or can gather open-ended responses.	✎Not interactive. ✎No in-depth feedback on issues. ✎May not elicit thoughts on a subject of importance if not included in survey. ✎Respondent bias – hard-to-reach populations often don't respond.	Should not be the only information-gathering mechanism – surveys should be supplemented with one or more of the interactive approaches.